# Chinese Mothers - Western Daughters? Cross-cultural Representations of Mother-Daughter Relationships in Contemporary Chinese and Western Women's Writing

by

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**Declaration**

The research work leading to this thesis has been undertaken in accordance with the safety policy of the University of Warwick. The thesis does not contain material submitted for any other degree.

Lee Wai-sum, Amy

**Abstract**

This study looks at women's prose narrative representing four major Chinese communities during the last 30 years, and focuses on the depiction of mother-daughter relationships among personae within the narrative texts. The thesis seeks to suggest that mother-daughter relationships within the texts are a reflection of how a text responds to its mother culture in the course of development.

Narrative prose ranging from self-professed autobiographies to the fictional, written by Chinese women from American-Chinese communities, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China, are examined in a comparative approach within an ethnical framework. The concept of a national literature is discussed with regard to different forms of Chinese-ness.

It is revealed, in the course of this examination, that each group of Chinese women's writing examined here demonstrates an acute awareness of a link with an original mother culture, the Chinese orientation. However, recent events both inside and outside China have inevitably shaped cultural development in these communities, resulting in splits and diversifications in the individual cultural consciousness.

Approached from this perspective, the Chinese mother culture gains a new vitality by virtue of shedding the burden of a long history. Focusing on the intertextual activities of regional writings, it is shown that represented Chinese-ness is no longer an unchanged and unchanging phenomenon, but is redefined each moment through the locus of interactions among independent hybrid communities.

## Introduction

This is a comparative study of narrative texts written mostly in the last thirty years by women representing major Chinese communities throughout the world. The subject has a special meaning for me as a Hong Kong Chinese who has had a western-style education under colonialism in Hong Kong, who has seen Hong Kong through the change-over to Chinese sovereignty, and who is now studying for a research degree in the ex-coloniser's country, the United Kingdom. Life experience and academic research interlock and interact with one another generating not only interesting phenomena, but also questions which need to be answered. Our relationship with our mother within the family and with the motherland outside the family plays a determining role in shaping us. It will be suggested that the mother, in different aspects of the term, holds one of the keys to understanding ourselves.

Mother and daughter relationships have often been regarded as more intimate than that with the son because of the shared gender. Feminists like Nancy Chodorow[1] and Dorothy Dinnerstein[2] see the gender of mother and daughter as the

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[1]Nancy Chodorow also argues for the mother being the central element in the child's formation of sexual identity. She takes a psychoanalytic point of view and argues against Freud's focus on the Oedipal complex and the Father as dominating the structure of gender differences. Instead Chodorow sees the pre-Oedipal period and the mother's relationship to the child as the formative elements in the later sexual development of the child. For details please refer to Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978).

[2] Dorothy Dinnerstein is one of the first American feminists to talk about children's gender identity formation as effects of mothering and child-rearing practices. She claims that the arrangement of mothering by women only creates a total dependence of the male child on the mother, a dependence which will change to fear in face of the overwhelming power the mother has over the child. With the growth of the male child, the dependence disappears but may turn into desire to control, which is manifested in the social arrangement to curtail women's behaviour. To solve this problem Dinnerstein argues for an end to sexual division of reproductive labour. For detailed elaboration of her theory, see *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (London: Souvenir, 1978).

distinguishing element which separates this relationship from the mother's to her son. While the boy is expected to take over when the father dies, the girl is expected to follow in the mother's footsteps. Expectations, both personal and social, indirectly mould the way girls are brought up, overseen by the mother. The bond between mother and daughter is partly held together by an adherence to this continuity. The mother, in teaching her daughter, is actually trying to reproduce herself in the girl.

The daughter therefore receives a double "reproduction" from the mother, a physical continuation of life, and a generation of an identity, both aspects already very much determined at the moment of conception. Women, who are all daughters, live a life trapped between the point of being reproduced in another's imprint and the point of reproducing another in her time. Coming to a realisation of the meaning to these life processes can be a struggle against psychological and cultural barriers over a long period of time. The narrative texts examined shown Chinese women in different environments trying to gain this insight through a reestablishment of connection with the mother(land).

To a certain extent, what Maxine Hong Kingston, the narrator, says about her story-telling experience, inherited from her mother, may be typical of these female journeyings: "The beginning is hers, the ending, mine."[3] The mother is the origin, the beginning, and the daughter picks up where she leaves off, a continuation of the same line. But this is not just a question of words. Olivia[4] has never been to China, but her journey back to Chengmian reconnects her to a past which she is not even conscious of. Chengmian, the motherland, is the origin of lives leading to the

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[3] Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (London: Picador, 1975), 184.

[4] Olivia is the narrator-character in Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses* (London: Flamingo, 1995). She follows her half-sister back to Chengmian, her native land, and comes to a new

American-born Olivia. The line of memory and orientation stretches across time, space, and culture, breaking through barriers and claiming Olivia back. She does not only pick up the line, but extends it to the foreign land. Olivia's daughter is born in America, but her origins are in Chengmian.

Female journeyings abound in the texts examined. Jing-mei[5] goes back to China to see her sisters, Maxine[6] travels over imaginary grounds, Zhang Xiaoxian's heroines[7] fly from city to city, Huang Biyun's travellers[8] cross time and space, Yi Shu's working women[9] are always on the move, Mulberry and Peach[10] psychologically interpenetrate one another, the daughters of Mainland China fly away from the trauma in the motherland, and Zhang Jie[11] travels back to the memory of her past with her mother. Journeying in different forms and at different speeds is the process by which these women come to terms with themselves. The idea of

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understanding of her origin.

[5] Jing-mei is the narrator of the frame story in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (London: Minerva Books, 1989). She represents her dead mother and goes back to China to see the lost twin sisters.

[6] Maxine is the main narrator in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (London: Picador, 1975). She is the first generation American-born Chinese who has difficulties recognising her identity.

[7] Zhang Xiaoxian is a popular female writer in Hong Kong. Her novels to be discussed here include: *Hebao li de danrenchuang* (Hong Kong: Huangguan chubanshe Hong Kong youxian gongsi, 1997), *Mianbaoshu shang de nuren* (Hong Kong: Huangguan chubanshe Hong Kong youxian gongsi, 1997), *San ge A Cup de nuren* (Hong Kong: Huangguan chubanshe Hong Kong youxian gongsi, 1997), *Sanyue li de xingfu bing* (Hong Kong: Huangguan chubanshe Hong Kong youxian gongsi, 1997), *Zaijian ye youshu* (Hong Kong: Huangguan chubanshe Hong Kong youxian gongsi, 1996).

[8] Huang Biyun, female writer in Hong Kong. *Qihou* (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1994), *Wenrou yu baolie* (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1994), and *Qizhong jingmo* (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1997) are discussed in the main content.

[9] Yi Shu is a prolific female writer of Hong Kong. *Juedui shi ge meng* (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1996) and *Yuyan* (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1991) are discussed in the chapter of Hong Kong women's writing.

[10] Mulberry and Peach are the two names used by the schizophrenic protagonist of Nieh Hualing's *Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China*, trans. Jane Parish Yang and Linda Lappin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981).

[11] Zhang Jie is a Mainland Chinese female writer, her *Shijie shang zui tengwo de na ge ren qu le*

travelling is the linking motif throughout the dissertation because it is symbolic of the movement a woman makes in her life. In the texts studied here, the life journey collaborates with individual, distinct journeys at different times to create meaning for the female traveller. They learn from their journeys, interpreting them, making sense out of them, and finally reproducing them as texts.

The texts of this female journeying are literary and cultural reflections of how these travellers become individuated, shaped by their relationship to their mother (culture). Written in different languages, these narratives of the female self lend themselves to a comparative study because of their common affiliation to a Chinese "identity." Chinese-ness is shown as a problematic concept because of tension between a general understanding of its broad inclusions, and its regional variations. Through a comparative examination of narratives from the four Chinese communities, a redefinition of Chinese-ness is attempted with specific awareness of their individual interaction with an ancient Chinese background.

The analysis in the following chapters takes the middle ground between what is usually called the French school[12] and American school[13] of comparative literature.[14]

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(Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1994) is examined in the last chapter.

[12] The so-called French school, because of political stability in France and its colonial control over a number of places in the world, "appears as oriented more towards the study of cultural transfer, always with France as either giver or receiver, concerned with defining and tracing 'national characteristics'," as stated in Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 24. Jieming Liu 劉介民 describes the French school as focusing on "influence study," emphasising the discovery of source. It focuses on mutual influence between different countries and writers. Comparative literature therefore concerns how one tradition incorporates another tradition, or how one writer turns the creative experience of another culture into his own work. Jieming Liu 劉介民, *Bijiao wenxue fangfa lun* 比較文學方法論 [*Comparative Literature Methodology*] (Taipei shi: Shibao wenhua chuban qiye youxian gongsi, 1990), 87.

[13] One of the most frequently quoted definitions of the American School of comparative literature is Henry Remak's: "Comparative literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of relationships between literature on the one hand, and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts (e.g. painting, sculpture, architecture, music), philosophy, history, the social sciences (e.g. politics, economics, sociology), the sciences, religion, etc., on the other. In brief, it is the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression." Henry Remak, "Comparative Literature, Its

While the French school is criticised as being Eurocentric, limiting the scope of analysis to literatures of major European nation states,[15] thus marginalising other literatures from the East, the American school's cross-disciplinary inclusiveness is also attacked for its looseness and tendency to be appropriated by cultural studies.[16]

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Definition and Function," in Newton Stallknecht and Horst Frenz eds., *Comparative Literature: Method and Perspective* (Carbondale: South Illinois Press, 1961), 3. As Susan Bassnett explains in *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), comparative literature is different today from when the subject first emerged. This can also be seen in the three reports commissioned by the American Comparative Literature Association, the focus and requirements of the subject have been shifting in the decades of development.

[14] There is no fixed number of established "schools" of comparative literature. Jieming Liu 劉介民 in his *Bijiao wenxue fangfa lun* 比較文學方法論 [*Comparative Literature Methodology*] (Taipei shi: Shibao wenhua chuban qiye youxian gongsi, 1990) has introduced four major schools of comparative literature, all with their individual approach to the subject. What he calls the "Chinese School," which is yet in the process of maturation, is an incorporation of the French, American and Russian schools into the study of Chinese literature, favoured by many comparatists in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Susan Bassnett has pointed out developments and additions to comparative literature in Britain. The British comparatists have gradually moved from the uncomfortable position they adopted between the French and the German schools, to one which focuses more on the literatures produced in the British Isles and the identity, and historical issues stemming from this group of writers.

[15] Rey Chow voices a frequent criticism of comparative literature: "Of all the prominent features of Eurocentrism, the one that stands out in the context of the university is the conception of culture as based on the modern European notion of the nation state. In this light, comparative literature has been rightly criticized for having concentrated on the literatures of a few strong nation-states in modern Europe." Rey Chow, "In the Name of Comparative Literature," *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, ed. by Charles Bernheimer (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 109. Focus on the literatures from major European states has come about because of the history of the subject. Another kind of criticism concerns the nature of the French perspective: "Although the French school has broken through the narrow confinements of nationalism, and advocates an international approach to study relations between literatures; comparative literature is still trapped in a very restricted area." Yimin Jia 賈益民, *Bijiao wenxue yu xiandai wenyi xue* 比較文學與現代文藝學[*Comparative Literature and Modern Literary Theory*] (Guangzhou: Huanan ligong daxue chubanshe, 1995), 13. Jia's criticism of the French perspective is the absence of aesthetic analysis in this approach.

[16] Jia remarks that the definition of comparative literature from the American school seems to be too general in terms of subject area and methodology for study. The seemingly loose boundary is also a concern of many American comparatists. In Michael Riffaterre's response to the Bernheimer report for the ACLA, he addresses the concern over this blurring of boundaries: "But the risk of such a confusion [between comparative literature and cultural studies] occurs only in the teaching of literature as a facet of a national or group identity, that is, in connection with a political agenda. There is no reason to fear such a confusion if comparative literature sticks to comparing, to defining general and constant rules, and cultural studies to focusing on identity and difference, the unique blend of a given social setup and the verbal forms expressing that difference." Michael Riffaterre, "On the Complementarity of Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies," *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, ed. by Charles Bernheimer (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 67. Whether Riffaterre's way of delineating the two approaches will work is beside the issue, but it shows a general concern with this problem.

What Jia terms the "Middle School,"[17] however, has incorporated both the critical perspectives of parallel studies as well as extending its application to other disciplines than literature.

The range of literature(s) studied in this thesis is an illustration of the crossroads between national literature and interdisciplinary studies. All the writers discussed may, in one way or another, be categorised as "Chinese women."[18] Yet as the division of the chapters and the texts analysed will show, the concept of a Chinese identity is not a simple one. It is not easy to decide, for instance, what a national Chinese literature should include or exclude, for the reality of Taiwan and the Mainland, SAR Hong Kong, and overseas communities of Chinese all point to a diversified understanding of what being Chinese means.

Yet it would not make much sense to ignore the national issue and focus merely on the aesthetic qualities of writings from places as different as Hong Kong and the Mainland. If the American comparatist approach is taken to the extreme, when all boundaries to comparison are set aside, popular cultural products, such as some of the Hong Kong novels presented here, will still yield insights when put side by side with much more "serious" literature produced from Mainland during the last three decades. But such a comparison may fail to highlight the significance of the political and cultural interactions which generate the basic difference in their literary environment in the first place.

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[17] Yimin Jia 賈益民, *Bijiao wenxue yu xiandai wenyi xue* 比較文學與現代文藝學 [*Comparative Literature and Modern Literary Theory*] (Guangzhou: Huanan ligong daxue chubanshe, 1995). Liu also mentions a "Middle of the Road School" in his book, introduced by U. Weisstein.

[18] One of the major issues here is the concept of Chiness-ness, in ethnic, cultural, and political sense. All the writers discussed, with the exception of Steven Mosher, who pens the book in the name of his subject, Chi An, are ethnic Chinese, but ethnicity is not taken as the only identity orientation by everyone. Maxine Hong Kingston, for example, claims to be an American writer, as discussed in chapter one of this thesis.

As Rey Chow has rightly stated, the Eurocentrism criticised in approaches to comparative literature is not only a matter of favouring texts from the major European nation states, but a matter concerning literature as "strictly subordinated to a social Darwinian understanding of the nation: 'masterpieces' correspond to 'master' nations and 'master' cultures."[19] An examination of writings from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the overseas Chinese communities will break with this so-called Eurocentrism, not only in its geographical manifestation but also in its "social Darwinian" manifestation. While the underlying framework is that of an inclusive concept of Chinese-ness, this study gives room for minor voices to articulate their mutual relationship with what is considered mainstream Chinese culture.

The narrative voice plays an important role in the articulation of this relationship between the individual Chinese communities and mainstream Chinese culture. In most of the narratives examined here, it takes the position of the first person narrator who is engaged in a complex love-hate relationship with her mother. In others the limelight falls on the main female character who is undergoing this difficult process of individuation away from the influence of her mother. This discussion seeks to show that selected narratives from various Chinese communities, picturing individual fictional relationships between mothers and daughters, can be seen as an expression of the individual Chinese communities' sentimental relation to their motherland. Having been distanced from the Mainland, and influenced by other cultural forces, these communities exist in problematic positions in relation to the Mainland which is the most politically recognised Chinese identity now. Contemporary narratives from overseas Chinese communities, SAR Hong Kong,

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[19] Rey Chow, "In the Name of Comparative Literature," *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, ed. Charles Bernheimer (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 109.

Taiwan, and even the Mainland itself are shown to be representations of self-realisation under and along this powerful influence.

Looking at the way personal identity is constructed, especially in the context of cross-cultural families such as the households discussed in Chapter one, it is interesting to note the difference in the concept of a self in Chinese and Western civilisations. Throughout the ages, Western civilisation has built up a vast number of personal narratives, and numerous academic and philosophical discussions about the self as a subject. From St. Augustine onwards,[20] personal confessions, autobiography, memoirs, letters and diaries have been written, featuring writers as personal narrators, and giving indirect evidence of personal existence and experiences. The twentieth century has seen an outpouring of autobiographies and semi-autobiographical narratives, some of which have become best-sellers alongside fiction. This enthusiasm, perhaps even a need, to set down one's own story is a significant feature of the Western cult of individualism, because the fact of a life being written down presupposes a belief in an integrated self, that the self can be constructed through the writing, and that there are people interested in learning about these personal stories.

Criticism of the autobiographical,[21] as a related discourse, has contributed to the understanding of self-writing. One of the concerns of autobiography studies is the ambiguity between fact and fiction in the narratives. It is not only a question of

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[20] St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1961).

[21] For autobiographical studies, please see *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. by James Olney (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980); *The American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Albert E. Stone (Eaglewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981); Elizabeth W. Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Laura Marcus, *Auto/Biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); Liz Stanley, *The Autobiographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist*

one's capacity to remember, which affects the "facts" in an autobiography. Fact and fiction may also be approached differently in terms of the writer's intentions in writing. Mary McCarthy, for one, claims that it is justifiable to use fictional elements to represent the narrator in an autobiography, if the resulting mood is more authentic.[22] Philippe Lejeune's idea that autobiography is a specific kind of prose narrative, written with the aim of focusing on the narrator's life and personality, is another attempt to define this genre of writing by naming the features it possesses.[23]

What Lejeune has said about the genre of autobiography has an effect also on how the female narratives in this dissertation can be read. His modifications about one of the identifying features of autobiography is a move from a writer-oriented approach to a more reader-oriented approach to a text.[24] The reading of narrative texts written by SAR Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas Chinese women writers as an exploration of a daughter's relationship with the mother Mainland employs such an approach, investing in the personal experience of a Hong Kong Chinese during a period of political and cultural change both in the mother and daughter cultures of China and Hong Kong. Being a Hong Kong Chinese receiving Western-style education, I am acutely aware of the intensive struggle between values from a

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*Auto/biography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

[22] Though this is not to say that Mary McCarthy herself makes no distinction between fact and fiction. On the contrary, she makes it very clear that she is recording what really took place in her autobiography *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* (London: Penguin, 1957), in claiming that she does not have to take responsibility for her relatives' strange behaviour because it is only a record. She has also written an article "Settling the Colonel's Hash," originally published in *Harpers*, but later included in *On the Contrary* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1961), 225-41, to defend her use of verifiable events in her submission to the magazine, stressing the importance of the story actually having taken place and its being her own experience.

[23] Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, trans. Katherine Leary, Theory and History of Literature, 52 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

[24] The term "reader-based" approach is not from Lejeune himself. In his Foreword to *On Autobiography*, Paul John Eakin explains Lejeune's earlier definition of autobiography and his later modifications. It is Eakin's opinion that "Lejeune was well on his way to establish a reader-based poetics of autobiography (ix)."

Chinese origin and acquired Western knowledge. Struggles of this kind can manifest both among members of the same family as well as between communities across geographical boundaries.

The juxtaposition of various "Chinese"[25] texts as autobiographical explorations of cultural identities is an interesting attempt. Autobiographies in Chinese literature are not totally absent, but are limited to the very distinguished persons in terms of their social or political status.[26] Fictional narratives are abundant, and to varying degrees personal experiences are intrinsic in their construction, but the degree of explicitness and the willingness of the authors to confer on these novels autobiographical status is much less evident than on the Western literary scene.

What are the factors that go into the making of this distinction? The initial picture seems to be that the habit of self-expression is different, Western people being more self-assertive and expressive of their selves, while the Chinese are more oblique in talking about themselves. This is certainly the case in terms of cultural

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[25] By "Chinese" I am referring to the overseas Chinese communities and the three major Chinese-speaking areas in East and South-East Asia: Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. As will be seen in the following chapters, the areas are linked to each other in a complex and intertwining manner, mainly because of the historical and political circumstances surrounding their convergence and separation. Each of these individual groups responds to the existing circumstances in a different manner, resulting in quite distinct literary consciousness in terms of self-identity and its representation; but here in this initial stage, I will take the liberty of considering these places as one unit first before further elaboration in the main discussion.

[26] Even in contemporary Chinese history, leaders have biographies written about them by appointed or self-initiated writers. There are a lot of books written about Mao Zedong 毛澤東, and even as recently as 1997, twenty years after his death, books which claim to uncover certain secrets of him are still being published, for example, Zhisui Li 李志綏, *Mao Zedong siren yisheng huiyilu* 毛澤東私人醫生回憶錄 [*The Private Life of Chairman Mao: The Memoirs of Mao's Personal Physician*] (Taibei shi: Shibao wenhua chuban qiye youxian gongsi, 1994). Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平, the late leader, who introduced China to a new economic environment, has had his biography written by his daughter: Maomao毛毛, *Wo de fuqin Deng Xiaoping* 我的父親鄧小平 [*Deng Xiaoping: My Father*] (New York: Basic Books, 1995). A life story written by the leader himself is much rarer. Pu Yi溥儀, the last emperor of China, wrote an autobiography called *Wo de qian bansheng* 我的前半生 [*From Emperor to Citizen: The Autobiography of Aisin-Gioro Pu Yi*] (Beijing: Qun Zhong chubanshe, 1964) putting the first half of his life in parallel with the downfall of the Manchurian empire. This is a rather unusual case, but the abrupt change of the form of government lends weight to that particular period of time and the personalities involved.

personality, but I would argue that behind this cult of personality there is a reason for its genesis in the historical and political development down the ages. The difference lies deeper than the mere expression of self-awareness; it involves a profound contrast in the way a self is perceived and understood. For, as mentioned earlier, the act of writing the self needs the initial conception and perception of a consciousness which is able to distinguish between itself and things, as well as other consciousness. This consciousness is unique to a person by virtue of the combined operation of this person's background, ability, and the power of external forces of influence like society, ideology and so forth. In other words, the self is an individual rendering but is also subject to effects from outside.

While Western civilisation seems to have a better developed history of individualism, creating a cult of the independent, separate individuals, this may not mean an absolute deviation in the people's concept of a self from the Chinese perspective. Mark Elvin suggests that there are comparable stages of development between the Chinese and the West in terms of a general interpretation of what a self encompasses

> Chinese ideas about the self from late archaic times to the present day were extraordinarily varied. If, however, a broad contrast may be tentatively made with comparable ideas in Europe over the same span of time it is probably best brought out by focusing on the Middle Ages and the early modern period, when it emerges most clearly.[27]

Convergence between the West and Chinese way of seeing a self can be found at certain periods of history, but the convergence moves with history.

It would be impractical to go through Chinese literary and cultural history trying to document the various changes in the perception of the self. Instead, this

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[27] Mark Elvin, *Another History: Essays on China from a European Perspective* (New South Wales: Wild Peony, 1996), 260.

study will focus on contemporary Chinese identities, and look upon them as a result of major cultural clashes between Chinese and the West from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Chinese people of course have different social responsibilities and rights to shoulder, each in their position. What they do not have, I would suggest, is the sense that their identity is not solely governed by the way they are socially related to each other. This lack of an awareness of the more personal elements in the concept of identity has a very different effect on the outlook of the Chinese, as expressed in their social structures and literary production. In the following, what is referred to as the "traditional" Chinese belongs to the period before this Western influence, though the qualities may still be found in Chinese communities today in various transformations.

Of the many differences between Chinese and Western cultures, the absence of a major consciousness-shaping religion with a god as the highest power may be considered the most prominent factor leading to differences in the conception of identity in traditional Chinese culture. The effects can perhaps best be seen by looking at Christianity's influence on Western civilisation. The teachings of the Bible, and the way the church is organised, exercise enormous power over the consciousness of those who believe in Christianity. The book of Genesis presents us with one of the most influential ideologies in Western culture: man is created individually, each with a specific responsibility, and is related to one another in different ways. Adam and Eve do not just stand as the ancestors of mankind, but also as the beginning of this individual link between God and mankind. They are able to communicate directly with God because the two original human beings are distinct, and the different punishment meted out to them again confirms the uniqueness and specificity of their identities. Moreover, the fact that they are

created to be masters over the animal kingdom, and exist in a pair instead of in great numbers, also points to a privileged position in the realm of the created, which constitutes the foundation on which Western civilisation bases its uniqueness of identity.

Apart from the direct teachings of the Bible, the way that Christianity structured social life is also the reason why Chinese people have a different concept of identity. Liang Shuming, a distinguished Chinese scholar, compares Chinese culture to Western culture, and also sees one of the major factors as the influence of Christianity. He writes:

> [the organization of Christianity] is exactly where Western people learn the principles of community organisation. First, that the individual is a subject of the organisation, which has direct control over the individual. Second, that every individual in the community is equal. It is very important, for what China lacks is this - not having the chance to learn this principle of equality.[28]

The extensive influence of Christianity has laid down a completely different system of community. In England, for example, the country was divided into administrative units where the centre was the parish community.[29] The parish priest and his wife became a kind of parental figure to the rest of the parish population. The citizens or villagers were supposed to look to the priest for help and advice not only in spiritual matters, but very often in day-to-day domestic matters as well. Thus the organisation of these small units comes to resemble a family, modelled on the even bigger holy family. God is "the Father," is worshipped as such, mankind being seen as his children. This structure of

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[28] Shuming Liang 梁漱溟, Zhongguo wenhua yaoyi 中國文化要義 [Key Ideas of Chinese Culture] (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian (Hong Kong) youxian gongsi, 1987), 61.

[29] Parish is the smallest unit of organisation in the Church of England, and acquires secular functions from mid-16th century. Since the 19th century reform of local government, the parish became the smallest unit of local government in rural areas in England and Wales, and the situation continued even after 1974 when local government was reorganised. The powers of this level of government

community serves as a very powerful counter-force to the family structure of flesh and blood. In contrast, the traditional Chinese family where the ancestral house is the only centre of the community, has a much more intensive hold on the individual because of the lack of other counter-forces.[30]

The advantage of Western community life, according to Liang, is that the people will be well trained in "gong de"公德: "qualities necessary for leading a community life."[31] For the Chinese, because their life is basically a family-oriented one, whenever anything needs to be done, people will ask for "favours" from those to whom they are close, instead of publicising the events and getting them done according to open "laws" which apply theoretically to every person equally.[32] This habit, with the lack of a sense of belonging to any group apart from one's family, the lack of discipline training, and the lack of ability to organise people, together form a basically non-communal mentality in the traditional Chinese population, as opposed to the organised and disciplined communal life in the West.

The presence or absence of a communal-mentality is significant in recognising where the final authority of a group of people lies. Liang thinks that the lack of a community to which the individual belongs means that the family as a unit will have dominant influence in a person's life. He says:

> In a tightly organised community, the individual is directly controlled and manipulated by the community; if the individual is aware of his position, he will

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are limited and optional, but it is an important channel of communications for local opinion.

[30] The hold of the Chinese family on the individual, in terms of the way one perceives oneself in relation to other people and to society in general, has been examined in Shuming Liang 梁漱溟, *Zhongguo wenhua yaoyi* 中國文化要義 [Key Ideas of Chinese Culture] (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian (Hong Kong) youxian gongsi, 1987). For the way religion and other social organisation influence the concept of individuality, please refer to chapters 3 to 6, 44-123.

[31] Ibid., 64.

[32] Ibid., 65.

> have to seek his own freedom and status within the group. Therefore the community and the individual are the two terms of a binary opposite, just like the right to the left.[33]

The community and the individual exist as opposite sides to a power-balance, with the community exerting control, and the individual struggling to maintain a certain degree of personal freedom. The picture of Chinese life, however, is different in Liang's eyes:

> Everyone is born with people (parents, siblings) who are related to him, and one's life is always lived within human relationships (one cannot be detached from society), that means, one's life is actually involved with all kinds of relationships. These relationships are in fact ethics.[34]

What Liang calls "ethics" here is similar in some ways to what he defines as communal relations. One's obligations to members of one's family, and extending to people outside the family, form a network of relations and rules to govern the way people behave.

Ethics, therefore, is perceived as the guiding principle of behaviour, as Liang writes:

> Ethics is nothing but for people to know clearly the rational basis of human relationship, and to attend to the other in this relatedness.[35]

Since ethics is a subordination of the individual to the people involved in the network, to a certain extent the ethics-oriented Chinese society as elaborated by Liang is not in principle opposite to Western community-oriented society, for in both systems the individual has to compromise with "public" needs. The family control over the individual in Chinese societies is felt to be more intensive than that of a community over the individual in a Western context because of the blood ties.

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[33] Ibid., 77.

[34] Ibid., 79.

[35] Ibid., 89.

What Liang has written in relation to the organisation of Chinese life belongs to a different generation in the Mainland. In the context of this dissertation, the chosen Chinese texts were all written in the second half of this century. With such drastic challenges to Chinese culture in the form of foreign invasions beginning from the early decades of this century, and changes that come with natural development, the Chinese life we see in the texts is enormously different. On top of that, one has to be aware that contemporary Chinese society is not homogenous but plural. Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the overseas communities are only the most obvious examples of this plurality; there are still a range of different traditions and practices within the Mainland due to the wide range of stages of economic development. It should be borne in mind that "Chinese" is never a uniform community; perhaps even less so than many other mixed cultures.

Therefore, when one looks at the role and discourse of religion or its absence in a Chinese community, one has to be aware of the various different "brands" of Chinese communities, as well as the historical period that is under consideration. Contemporary Chinese communities, especially those which are economically developed, for example, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and some major cities in Mainland China, have known Western influence such as Christianity for quite a long time. It is inevitable that given the time, Western beliefs, such as a religion, have transformed these communities variously. In the last three chapters, when contemporary literature written in Chinese is used as the corpus of exploration into representation of the female in Chinese, one has to be aware of the influence of Western concepts acting on remnants of the ancient Han culture passed down and safely guarded from generation to generation, resulting in hybrid identities.

Ancient Chinese culture, however, does not have a religion in the sense that

Christianity is a religion in the West.[36] Buddhism, which has long been seen and juxtaposed with Christianity as the equivalent of religion in traditional Chinese culture, was an import from India, and immediately underwent various changes according to different ways of interpretation. While it is true to say that Buddhism, in its different strands, has widespread influence over the Chinese, it does not work quite in the same way as Christianity does over Western society. Buddhism is closer to a way of thinking, and advocates meditation as a means to bring the spirit

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[36] There are deities in ancient Chinese culture, but they are imaginative transformations from natural elements and animals people encounter in their daily life. The variety, forms and functions of these deities reflect the stage of their civilisation and the close relationship people have with nature. Introducing religion in old China, Xiaodun Wang 王小盾 writes in *Shenhua huashen* 神話話神 [From Mythology to Gods] (Taibei shi: Shiji wenwu chubanshe, 1992), "There are two kinds of gods in China, one is god originating from primitive beliefs, like the gods of nature and those symbolised by totem animals ... the other type is matured from the religious beliefs in civilized society, for instance fairies and all kinds of human gods." The ancient gods do not form a coherent and comprehensive religion in the Chinese consciousness, and gradually transformed into mythical figures in popular folklore. One of the most widespread legends surviving in the general consciousness is the origin of creation, with Fu Hei (伏羲) and Nu Wuo (女媧) as the ancestors of the human race.

Fu Hei (伏羲) is probably the most respected male god among China's ancient gods. There are a lot of heroic stories about his contribution to human culture. According to legend, he is a descendent of the Thunder God, and his mother, who comes from a happy land, gets impregnated by stepping on the footprints of the Thunder God. Fu Hei himself is described as half human and half serpent. Although compared to Nu Wuo, his creative power is not fundamental, yet he is also involved in creation by having done three important things. He first draws 八卦, which is used for taking down events, predicting the future, and expressing thoughts. This brings human history from the stage of using knots or carving on wood into a higher stage. The second thing he does is the establishment of a series of systems: wedding rites, cooking methods, and the calendar. The third thing is to push material civilisation into an advanced stage, he gets fire from wood, sets traps for animals, and invents string music. In some records, he is depicted as an originator of crafts.

Nu Wuo (女媧) is the goddess of creation. Legend has it that she is capable of making seventy changes every day, that her intestines can evolve into ten gods of the west; these all point to her power of creativity. There is no record as to where she comes from, only that she is the one who uses clay and water to create mankind according to her own image. Later she establishes the system of marriage, so that human beings can "create" their own kind. In her old age, there is a ferocious battle between the Fire God and the Water God, in competition for the crown, and this battle kills off a lot of human beings. Most importantly, the Water God, seeing his imminent defeat, knocks down one of the pillars which support the sky, causing major disasters. It is again Nu Wuo who mends the sky and saves creation, the supposed ancestors of humankind in ancient Chinese myths.

For details of the various gods in ancient Chinese culture, as well as variations on the ancient creation myth, please refer to Xiaodun Wang 王小盾, *Shenhua huashen* 神話話神 [From Mythology to Gods] (Taibei shi: Shiji wenwu chubanshe, 1992); also Jinglin Wang 王景琳, *Guishen de moli: Han minzu de guishen xinyang* 鬼神的魔力: 漢民族的鬼神信仰 [The Power of Spirits: Spiritual Beliefs of Han Chinese] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1992).

to a higher state, and merge with the spirit of the cosmos. It does not work like Christianity because the relationship between Buddha and believers is not the parent-children relationship between the Christian God and the Christians. God is a conceptual moral guide to western civilisation because He has given them the ten commandments to follow, and He is supposed to judge his people according to His laws. What Buddhists aim to arrive at finally is a state of mind at one with the state of the cosmos, to get rid of the body and the burden it means for people.[37]

If the moral force in Western civilisation comes from the God its people believe in, the Chinese people's "god," in this sense, exists in the form of a tight set of moral principles internalised in the collective identity. While believers in the Christian religion see themselves as individuals following a set of rules laid down by a higher individual, Chinese people exercise their moral belief through a mutual guarding according to their internalised principles. A distance between human beings and the higher power helps set a boundary between the two, rendering the sense of individuality more acute. Internalised principles of behaviour lack this function of granting each person the sense of separation from an other, which means an absence of perspective for the people to identify themselves in contrast to another.

This kind of collective mentality works when all people follow the same principles towards the same goal. The tightly knitted system can easily be thrown into chaos if one knows how to exploit its rigidity, as can be seen in what happened

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[37] The suffering body of Jesus Christ, the material good he has done as part of his redemptive mission, and the creation of the first human beings Adam and Eve, are all pointing to the importance of the body as a reality in Christianity. In Buddhism, the body is regarded as temporary and even an obstacle to the final goal of being at one with the cosmos. Although the afterlife is very much on the agenda of the Christian religion, the present physical body is given much more emphasis in Christianity than in Buddhism. Refer to Shuming Liang 梁漱溟, *Zhongguo wenhua yaoyi* 中國文化要義 [Key Ideas of Chinese Culture] (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian (Hong Kong) youxian gongsi, 1987) for detailed discussion of the difference between these two religions; and Mark Elvin, *Another History: Essays on China from a European Perspective* (Broadway, New South Wales: Wild Peony, 1996), 227-60.

in the late 1950s in the build-up towards the Cultural Revolution (1967-76). The Great Leap Forward (1956-58) was hailed as the programme to achieve Western standards in agricultural and industrial production. The great cause was so highly internalised in the collective mind that nothing else was more important than the accomplishment of this cause: no God, no living person could be above this except for the one who was equal to this cause, Mao himself. The result was well-documented, and need not be recalled here in detail. The absence of a fearful, judgmental god makes the domination by a cause much easier, because human beings need something to look up to.[38]

Although Christianity did enter into China, and although today the Chinese government does not ban it completely, its presence did not overthrow the fundamental life patterns in Chinese society. Liang writes:

> When Christianity spread to China, [community life format encounters familial life format], our [Chinese] lifestyle has never been modified by the other

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[38] The hardship and tragedies in these two decades were generally unknown to the world outside China until the last decade when personal memoirs of foreign visitors and researchers began to be published. People were astounded by the scale of famine and destruction, as well as the possibility that such a scale of human sacrifice could have been hidden from the world for so long. On top of everything else, one of the puzzles of the century is how could the Chinese have kept on with the programme when so many of the issues, ideals, reports were so obviously impossible and even ridiculous to claim. Ignorance is certainly one reason, but I think the lack of a fearful god in the Chinese mind calls for dominating abstract principles to take its place. In "The Future of an Illusion" (1927), Freud summarises the functions of gods to the believers: "they must exorcize the terrors of nature, they must reconcile men to the cruelty of Fate, particularly as it is shown in death, and they must compensate them for the sufferings and privations which a civilized life in common has imposed on them." (197) Basically, religion, and the gods in the discourse are used to "[defend] oneself against the crushingly superior force of nature," and "to rectify the shortcomings of civilization which made themselves painfully felt." (201) Different religions may successfully achieve these aims to different degrees, but because, basically, religion only provides a spiritual fulfilment and does not guarantee material improvement, the fact that the material situation has not changed for the better should not be a hindrance to the people's confidence in the religion. Chairman Mao, in the glorification of his foresight and the deification of his image, fills in the gap for a god in the Chinese people's mind. The slogan of "Father is dear, Mother is dear, but not as dear as Chairman Mao" (爹親娘親, 不及毛主席親) is a good illustration of how Chairman Mao is conceived as someone who cuts into the immediate family circle, and pulls individuals away from family ties, exactly as Liang has discovered in the working of Christianity. For details of what happened during those years, especially about the famine, please see Jasper Becker, *Hungry Ghosts: China's Secret Famine* (London: John Murray, 1996). For the way Freud sees religion functioning in contemporary social environment, please see Sigmund Freud, "The Future of an Illusion" (1927), *Penguin Freud Library*, vol. 12 (London: Penguin, 1985), 179-241.

> [Western] lifestyle. On the contrary, it suits itself to ours. Not only is it that *The New Testament* has to be translated with modifications from the original, but the people from the church also recognise the rituals Chinese perform in respect of their ancestors and Confucius.[39]

Instead, the binding force exerted by Christianity on Western life remains firmly in the grip of the family unit in the traditional Chinese population. The family structure, even as late as the early twentieth century, was a large network of blood-relations living under a single power source, the father. This father figure presided over the entire family which might consist of several wives (the senior wife and various concubines), the offspring of each of the wives, and the grandchildren. For the better-off family, there was often a team of servants and sometimes the whole family worked for the same household.[40] Even when the offspring came of age and got married, they still lived in the same house under the same rule of the father-patriarch. The power structure in this kind of family was extremely centralised, the father made all the decisions and was responsible for providing for the whole family - the members seldom had private property except for gifts.

Not only was the power centralised, but this family unit had a distinctly rigid hierarchy as well. Under the patriarch, what was permissible and what was not were unwritten but rigid rules. Those in the hierarchy could not transgress, even by a little, the understood protocol without a big fuss being made and the would-be transgression prevented.[41] In such power structures, the individual was more like a

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[39] Shuming Liang 梁漱溟, *Zhongguo wenhua yaoyi* 中國文化要義 [Key Idea of Chinese Culture] (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian (Hong Kong) youxian gongsi, 1987), 74.

[40] It was usual practice for women to have a maid follow them to the new household when they married into it. Only really poor women had no maids to serve them in the family.

[41] The big family of several generations all living under the same roof, all under the strict rule of the patriarch, has featured in quite a number of books, films and dramas. In fact, this kind of family structure and the problems it causes to people are so common that it has become a standard repertoire. One of the most well-known series of fictions with this theme is *Ji liu sanbuqu: Jia chun qiu* 激流三部曲：家春秋 [*Family, Spring, Autumn*] (Beijing: Renmin wenhua chubanshe, 1981) by Ba Jin 巴

category of citizen than an individual with opinions with his or her idiosyncratic choices. They were supposed to act according to the social laws they belonged to instead of what they personally wanted or thought fit. The most respected people were those who could repress successfully their personal desires and obey the general ones. In this respect, whether the people had names or not did not matter that much, because their names did not give them the individuality that is taken for granted in a Western society.[42] The central power structure in the Chinese family shows a similar firmness in controlling the behaviour of those within the hierarchy as the Christian communities. The patriarch in the Chinese family is the same figure of judgement as the Lord, and the members all have to be ruled by the law of the father.

This narrow space for individuation can also be reflected in other social institutions. One of the more obvious ones is marriage. In ancient Chinese society, it was legal to have more than one wife, as long as the man could financially support them and the children. In fact, the more wives he had, the more virile and capable he was seen to be. The marriage system was totally unfair in terms of what the man and the woman got out of it. The man had all the choice and independence, while the woman, no matter whether she was from a well-to-do family or not, was totally subject to the commands of the husband. The whole system of marriage was like a business transaction, whereby the woman was a piece of merchandise

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金. Confusions and pain are the dominant qualities in such a household especially when it is ruled by the iron fist of tradition. As soon as the outside world has changed, those living inside the house will also have to adapt. Refusal to do so will only end in a bitter and vain struggle with the change of time, as seen in this three-volume family history.

[42] In big families, even name-giving is a ceremony. For those who are educated and well off, the choice of names has to fulfill certain priorities specific to the family, for example they have to reflect fittingly the virtues of the family, they have to bring good luck, to show the status of the father, and usually siblings share the same theme. So even in naming, the concern is not the individuality of that unique person.

transferred from one ownership to another, and had no say in the whole business. It is quite obvious that for the woman there was no question of an independent right of decision at all if she had to undergo such treatment and be reduced to the status of goods.[43]

On top of that, after they were married into the family, the way power was distributed did not allow any space for her to come to exercise independent thinking, if she is aware of her ability at all. It is well known that the Chinese culture favours sons over daughters, something which has to do with the prevailing structure of the economy and cultural beliefs. In a big family, the status of the wife was especially dependent on the number of male children she could produce, because it was supposed to be a virtue, and ensured the perpetuation of the family name and property. Therefore very often in literary representations of this kind of big family, the wives' names are not mentioned at all, simply because they do not have to be individuals, they are only distinguished from one another by virtue of their order in marrying into the family.

It is true that compared to the female, the males had a much better life, no matter to what social class they belonged. Although the freedom allowed to them was much greater than the women, they nonetheless still had to abide by the rules of the patriarchal family. They also had their roles to play, and could not transgress the traditional system of power distribution and social expectations. This suppression from the outside and repression from the inside together may account for the absence of a major autobiographical tradition, which has such a long history

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[43] Arranged marriage by parents is common in older Chinese families and in some western societies until very recently. In some of the texts discussed in the following chapters, we are shown that daughters in modern Chinese families rebel against the practice and try to take charge of their own lives. This can be seen as their acceptance of a western belief in freedom of choice.

in Western civilisation. The autobiographical writing in Chinese that can be found today has been mostly written since the beginning of the twentieth century, when Chinese culture is no longer the traditionally conservative and almost Confucian-dominated. Knowledge of science and new ideas about political thoughts and individuality have entered the consciousness of some educated Chinese, and perspectives about who they are and what they are begin to form.

The great surge of personal writing after the Cultural Revolution indicates both a heightened consciousness about one's individuality, as well as a more open social and political climate for its expression. Great amount of damage to life and property come as a result of the Great Famine, Great Leap Forward, and finally the Cultural Revolution. However, because the major group of sufferers were illiterate farmers, no one living outside China had much idea what was going on. At least a decade later, with the downfall of the Gang of Four, the political climate changed to that of a more liberal kind, and it was then that educated younger people, who after a decade of corrective labour, were restored to their birth places, began to publish personal accounts of the trauma, called Scar literature.[44]

Scar literature presents a very interesting phenomenon which points directly to the heart of this discussion. On the one hand, Scar literature represents individual experiences written by people who have first hand knowledge of such encounter.

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[44] Scar literature 傷痕文學 is the name used by many overseas scholars of Chinese literature to refer to a group of writing appearing after the Cultural Revolution. Personal experience showing the suffering caused by the political chaos, second hand information about the conditions of friends and relatives during the ten-year revolution seek to show the reckless power play behind the call for changes in the Cultural Revolution. As this is not an official name agreed by all, some critics call the same group of literature baolu wenxue 暴露文學 [Literature of Exposure], kangyi wenxue 抗議文學 [Literature of Protest], and also rendao zhuyi wenxue 人道主義文學 [Literature of Humanism]. See Ruoxi Chen 陳若曦, "Chen Ruoxi tan shanghenwenxue - jian ji zhonggong zuojia xiezuo ziyou de zaoyu" 陳若曦談傷痕文學 - 兼及中共作家寫作自由的遭遇 [Chen Ruoxi on Scar Literature - And Mainland Writers' Experience with Freedom of Writing], *Gedama gaozhuang* 疙瘩媽告狀, 大陸傷痕文學選集 [Mainland Scar Literature Series], Keding Li 李克

Its emergence is the combined result of historical change and adoption of Western beliefs as in the New Cultural Movement. On the other hand, the Cultural Revolution was so much a collective experience that the "I" in the various stories almost all share similar experiences.[45] The individual in these narratives is very much a part of a collective, a face in the mass. Compared to the Western tradition of autobiographical writing, the idea of "individuality" in these traumatic accounts lacks the uniqueness found in personal accounts recorded by Western autobiographers.

Modern Chinese autobiographical writing, therefore, exhibits conflicts which show tension between repressions of the individual handed down from ancient practices, and newly imported Western cult of the individual during the New Cultural Movement. For it would be quite untrue to say that there was no autobiographical writing at all in ancient Chinese literature, because literature itself has to spring from the writer's personal experience. In the broadest sense, every piece of literary writing is autobiographical. Apart from that, the autobiographical in Chinese literature is very rare indeed, and it is not difficult to understand why. In ancient China, the literati were subjected to a government whose power was distributed sporadically in the provinces and districts. News and all communications were delivered from the scattered districts to the central government through a network of correspondence. Every individual felt watched over by some hidden agent, and any expression of personal opinion might easily be

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定 et al., Vol. 1 (Taibei shi: Yuanliu chuban sheye gufan youxian gongsi, 1982).

[45] At least those writers who make it to publication. No matter whether the literature is written in English or Chinese, because the mass experience was so overwhelming, the experiences recorded are more or less the same: Nien Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai* (London: Flamingo, 1986); Anchee Min, *Red Azalea* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1993); Rong Zhang (Jung Chang), *Wild Swans* (London: Flamingo, 1991); even Sirin Phathanothai, *The Dragon's Pearl* (London: Pocket Books, 1994).

interpreted, re-interpreted and passed on to those who held the reins of power. Under this power structure, it was easy to understand why the personal had to be hidden, under layers of disguise and displacement so that one could be safe from political persecution.[46]

With this tradition of repressing the personal in mainstream Chinese literature, one can see the practical reasons for a lack of self-expressive literature until modern times. The relative geographical isolation of China from the West helps maintain this self-repression in Chinese literature throughout its history. The change comes about with encounters with Western civilisation, the first one being the Opium Wars in 1840 which forced open the closed doors of China, allowing not only foreign goods but also foreign ideas to enter the Chinese motherland. This head-on collision between the Chinese and the West sparked off a long series of conflicts which unsettled the hitherto firmly held Chinese concepts of behaviour.

Chinese culture has always received Western influence with a mixed attitude. While Westernisation means having the ability to catch up with the technologically advanced countries of the world, the process simultaneously points to an eroding of much valued traditions. Part of the horror of the Cultural Revolution also comes from the ruthless and large scale destruction of what had remained Chinese till then. Whether it is technological Westernisation, or merely the idea of progress beyond the traditional Chinese practices and beliefs, changes introduced from outside the traditional Chinese concepts bring forth doubts, challenges, and possibly

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[46] It is a particular feature of Chinese literature that, from the earliest times, Chinese literature has always been concerned with politics, and literary products are expected to reflect the writer's knowledge and sensibility about the contemporary political situation. It is no accident that narrative fiction has never been a respectable genre in old Chinese culture because story-telling for its own sake is regarded as frivolous and un-constructive in the face of the politically conscious literati. Skill in story-telling will never get a scholar very far in his career, because it is regarded as a method of entertainment only.

redefinitions of their identities.

Today, there is one Mainland China (the PRC), established on the same piece of land which holds five thousand years of Chinese history, which has experienced massive import of Western ideas at the beginning of the twentieth century; but there is no one definitive Chinese-ness. China's interaction with outside, mostly with the West, have brought forth not only differences in ways of thinking, but have resulted in real political changes. Emigration to foreign places, British colonisation of Hong Kong, the reality of Taiwan, as well as the founding of the PRC are all historical realities contributing to the changing contents of Chinese-ness.

This study is an attempt to look into the contents of this multifaced Chinese-ness. It is hoped that the writing of overseas Chinese, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China itself, can be used as illustrations of how these communities are directly defined by their relationship to the motherland: the mother figure being a symbol of love, nurture, a sense of belonging and orientation. Women's writing is chosen as the content of study because every woman has been a daughter, and mother-daughter link has an extra coherence with regard to their common gender, and the social arrangement of family life in Chinese communities. Mother and son do not relate to one another in the same intimate way as mother and daughter.

What is constructed in the following is a journey into the representations of women by themselves, beginning with the site where the East and the West live together in the mixed household. Having looked at the fundamental difference in life organisation in ancient China and the West, one should be aware that any cross-cultural application of theories and discourses should be made with discretion. Theories of psychoanalysis, sociology, cultural and literary studies, as well as gender studies, will be used in the following investigation whenever helpful, in the hope

that a critical reading of such texts will not only yield a better understanding of women's self-representations, but also help facilitate a redefinition of Chinese identities expressed through a mother-daughter relationship.

The main chapters are arranged in the form of a journey to the mother. Here the "mother" is not restricted to the person but is also a cultural construct, a metaphor. The reason for expanding the meaning of the mother is a recognition of the powerful influence the relationship with one's mother has on one's psychological make-up. It is hoped to show that the impact of one's first relationship with a woman has such fundamental impact on one's other experiences that the "mother" is discernible practically everywhere in one's consciousness and unconsciousness.

The first chapter is concerned with cultural conflict in the same house. In this chapter, North American born Chinese women reflect upon their own kind of identity crises. Mothers born in China were brought up in a very different way, and in emigrating, they take with them a version of this experience and hope, in one way or another, to bring their daughters up according to it, whom they see as threatened by the (g)host culture. If to be a woman in a patriarchal society is a problem, to be a woman who is constantly torn between two opposing forces is nothing short of disastrous. Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*[47] do ample justice to the confusion experienced by the girl when an intense conflict of allegiance arises between her and her mother. *The Joy Luck Club* and *One Hundred Secret Senses* are narratives of American born Chinese women who attempt to navigate the waters of mother-daughter continuation

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[47] Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (London: Picador, 1975).

in search of a grounding to understand their own identity.

To Hong Kong, "the mother," in the metaphorical sense, is an absence. Hong Kong literature is by nature orphaned because of its severance from Mainland Chinese literature since colonisation. Having been ruled by a foreign power for more than 150 years, and having been successfully developed into an international financial centre, Hong Kong is formed and reformed every day by cultural forces from all over the world - the mother culture of Mainland China among them. Chinese influence is not non-existent in Hong Kong, but it is side by side with, and sometimes in competition with, other forces of influence which have finally become part of the local Hong Kong culture.

The chapter on Hong Kong looks at an orphaned culture - or one that is nurtured by collective mothering - and how the daughters talk about themselves. The 1970s to the 1990s is an important period because the 1970s saw the blossoming of a Cantonese culture (whereas in the 1940s to 1950s the flood of refugees from Shanghai and other provinces brought with them the resources for financial development, making the culture a heavily Mandarin-influenced one), and from early 1980s talks of returning to China began to register the concept of a Chinese mother culture in the minds of the public. Especially in the final decade of colonial rule, the literary (as well as cultural in a wider sense) scene was filled with expressions of doubts and fears of that return to the mother culture, a daughter's fear of the mother.

Taiwan is another case of severed ties with the motherland, only in her case the cut has been more complicated. Taiwan was transferred from hand to hand, serving as colony for several countries and the fact that natives lived on the land long before Mainland people laid a claim on its sovereignty makes the Chinese-ness

in her culture problematic. Added to this is the civil war between the Communist Party and the KMT, leaving the issue of territorial identity unresolved even today. By looking at some of the fictional and prose writing of contemporary female Chinese writers, we see how the political conflict with the motherland has influenced the form and discourse of Taiwan's writing. Equally orphaned daughters of Chinese culture, Taiwan poses a different problem and certainly offers very different ways of dealing with it in her narratives.

The final chapter is a literary and literal return to Mother China. With the vast territory as well as one of the longest surviving histories in the world, China is endowed with a "mother" image. The Huang He, especially, is seen as the origin of Chinese civilisation because the river irrigates such vast areas, allowing agriculture to be carried out to sustain life. However as the international position of China began to change in relation to other, younger, nations, criticism of the Chinese ways of thinking arose. In 1986 the general public was shocked by the filming of a six-part TV series called *He Shang* 河殤. In it a completely different perspective of the Huang He was given: its being a destructive force rather than a nurturing force because it keeps China in the agrarian stage, preventing her from competing with other younger powers who are the dominating powers on the international stage. This challenge to the idea of China as a nurturing mother makes us think and rethink the meaning of the mother image.

Modern China then with its collective traumatic experiences, and the many problems regarding its management, becomes an ironic reality to the motherland image. In this sense, Zhang Jie's *Shijie shang zui teng wo de na ge ren qu le*[48] is

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[48] Jie Zhang 張潔, *Shijie shang zui tengwo de na ge ren qu le* 世界上最疼我的那個人去了 [The One Who Loves Me the Most is Gone] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1994), 1-215.

indicative of the whole outlook. The self-confident and mature narrator attended her mother all through her last days. Through the daily encounter with the dying mother, she rediscovered things that she had ignored for years, which then led to an entirely new understanding of herself. The other texts discussed in this chapter are generally regarded as Scar literature, revealing that suffering has enlightened Chinese women in some ways about their identity. It is hoped to show that even the experience of suffering can bring forth something positive in terms of understanding.

The journey through these four chapters is one through different lands and ideologies, but the underlying common ground is the imprint of the mother on the daughter's perception of herself in relation to society. The mother, being the first person to have an intense relationship with the girl, leaves on the daughter a mark which lasts for the rest of her life, whether the daughter is by her side or not. In this examination of major and minor voices of Chinese-ness, I hope to show that the concept of a dominant and stable Chines identity is erased. As will be related through these various women's voices, the maternal bond exerts its influence not only on the nuclear family represented in the narratives, but operates on the framework of cultures which are related to one another through a common origin as well.

## Chapter One

## From the Bond to the Intrigue

The Introduction sought to establish a framework to explore the mother-daughter relationship, through the cultural differences between the Chinese and the West, as well as the cultural interactions among various kinds of Chinese-ness. It has also been noted that the sentiments and concerns voiced in the narratives from these Chinese communities over the past decades may represent a cultural mother-daughter lineage with China the motherland. This chapter, which is the starting point of the journey to the other side of the "umbilical cord," explores the site where Chinese-ness meets with another major cultural system in American-Chinese households.

The journey of exploration has to start here because this is where a number of factors in the identity search converge. Contemporary female writing in the American-Chinese context is a field of possibilities because the meeting point between two cultures and two generations invariably generates space for understanding both sides of the clash. Not only does it create an opportunity to look into the nature of female-representations in these two cultures, but most importantly it highlights the interaction of cultural differences which is operating in all the texts to be discussed in the rest of this study. Due to the process of cultural interaction, which involves shifts of time, culture, and ideologies, representation of female selves changes. In the following, these factors of interaction will be examined first before moving to the main texts to look at cultural clashes in modern and contemporary American-Chinese society.

Orientalism may be explained as the literary construction of an abstract unit called the East, as discussed by Edward Said.[1] In an Orientalist discourse, the West, which is the speaking subject, allocates a set of qualities to an imaginary East, contrary to what are regarded as Western qualities, to form a moral binarism between the negative East and the affirmative West. As a literary and cultural theory,[2] Said's Orientalism makes use of two other concepts of representation and their relationship to power: the West, by writing studies about the construct called "the East," demonstrates its power over this area by means of its knowledge; on the other hand, the speaking subject as representative of an elitist society, exercises its control over the masses in exotic societies. It is a discourse constructed by the West about the East, not necessarily representing the East as it is, but is a functional tool which can achieve certain aims.

In Said's own words, the discourse of Orientalism is a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient,"[3] and this cultural construct of what the East is, becomes the "deepest and most recurring images of the Other"[4] from the point of view of the West. The purpose of bringing up this binary opposition between the concept of the East and the West is not to evaluate the validity of what Said has said about this cultural phenomenon, but to point out the artificiality

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[1] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

[2] "Orientalism" is by no means a new term in the arts. Simply speaking, it denotes the study of different aspects of the Oriental in order to better appreciate its value. John M. MacKenzie in his *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) seeks to have an overview of the debate concerning studies of the Oriental, and in attempting such a task, takes into consideration the major changes of concepts in the meaning of Orientalism. He writes in the Preface: "The word originally had a wholly sympathetic ring: the study of the languages, literature, religions, thought, arts and social life of the East in order to make them available to the West, even in order to protect them from occidental cultural arrogance in the age of imperialism. (xii)" That is very different from the theory of a cultural construct that Said has proposed in his 1978 work.

[3] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 3.

[4] Ibid., 1.

of preconceptions culturally imposed on certain identity orientations. The awareness of these culturally constructed images and values is vital to the aim of this study because very often understanding human beings depends a lot on the understanding of the culture from where they come. Similarly, in the texts to be examined, characters perceive and understand each other through the screen of their own cultural orientations. Preconceptions about qualities "inherent" in a culture may lead to major misunderstandings about one's identity or self-perception.

Since the East is only a Western construct, the reverse can also be the case. As the West builds up the East as a discursive object, it is also engaged in an indirect construction of itself, because the East acts as a mirror to reflect the West. In Chen Xiaomei's essay, *Occidentalism*,[5] the subject position reverses. This time the speaking subject is Post-Mao Chinese literature, which, in its various forms, constructs a particular Western society against the official Western discourse. What Orientalism and Occidentalism tell us, after all, is not that there is an East with certain qualities and that there is a West with opposite or even different qualities, but that there are different positions to take when analysing cultural phenomena, and it is important to contextualise these positions because of the relational differences of meaning to different parties.

The East and the West, as delineated above, meet in fictional family scenarios as two different, sometimes contradictory forces working on the relationship among people, especially between mother and daughter. They also take on further implications in the two generations represented by the mother and the daughter: the mother as the product and bearer of the values and beliefs in old China, and the

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[5] Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

daughter as the co-product of the mother's upbringing and external input from North American society. This is a complication on top of a mere cultural encounter because even a culture is not uniform in time and place. Chinese culture itself is not a fixed set of 5,000 years old practices. Moreover, customs and conventions in one part of China are different from those of another, not to say between the Chinese on the Mainland and the Chinese communities scattered abroad. When the mothers unpack their suitcases of memories and beliefs from old China and find them out of place against the modern U.S. reality, they have to act as the cultural translator to mediate the transferral of information to their American daughters.

Similarly, when we regard the daughter as representing the late 1970s North American culture, as seen in the selected narratives, we must also take into account the kind of exposure a first generation American-born Chinese received at that particular time and place. The mere fact that they are perceived to have a "yellow" complexion may already presuppose a specific way of understanding them and thus the treatment of these people will be different accordingly. Therefore the qualifiers "Chinese" and "North American" have to be taken with these particular cultural complications in mind. Apart from that, "culture" refers to so many things in a particular group that it can mean very different things in different contexts. For a married woman who has to take charge of the household, cooking and managing a Chinese family, what to eat, how to eat and when to eat form a great part of her repertoire of knowledge, but for an American counterpart, or even a Chinese wife who has lived in America for some years, the word "culture" probably includes some politics and social welfare. All these qualifications are stated to serve as a background for interpreting the intercultural and inter-generational encounter between mother and daughter, in helping to situate the impact of the above matters on their subjectivities.

Besides the major opposition between the so-called East and West in the family encounter, the conflicts between mother and daughter as two generations coming from the same heritage is also thought-provoking. The mother has been cut from the root of her native soil while the daughter may have no grounding in her "mother culture."[6] How is the mother to handle the materials she has brought with her in relation to her daughter? Should she just translate literally the whole set of beliefs for her foreign daughter? Or will she have to select and modify part of the "traditions" she has inherited to accommodate the changed place and time of their lives? At the receiving end, what is the daughter to make of this information from her distant ancestors? The most complicated issue in this interaction is the fact that mother and daughter are bonded together by a possibly common future. Mother-son relationship is problematic, yet mother-daughter relationship may be even more confusing for both because of the gender identity.

The intensity of this mother-daughter intimacy very often becomes the cause for major conflicts between them. Semiotic communication between mother and

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[6]The term "mother culture" will be recurring throughout this whole study, and because of the complexities concerning the literal and cultural meaning of the term "mother," mother culture will also be employed in a variety of contexts. The most common way of understanding mother culture may be the reference to one's native land. The place where one was born will naturally play a role in shaping certain aspects of this individual's growth, way of thinking and value systems. Having said that, "native" may not have taken fully into account the elements of time and change in a culture. As seen in this study, Chinese culture runs diagonally for thousands of years, across a vast extent of land. Calling one's native culture Chinese is not specific enough to give a meaningful picture of the person's background because the qualifier means concepts and values constantly in flux. Besides the reference to one's native birthplace, mother culture can also be employed to refer specifically to the mother's culture, the mother being a woman inhabiting a rather fixed position in a given social environment. Societies vary, but to different degrees the mother discussed in this study takes up a relatively domestic role in the family structure, and is in most cases subordinated to the authority of the father. In that sense, the mother culture will have a dominantly oppressive hold on the daughter when the handing down of the teaching is powerful enough. Yet the other side of this culture will also incorporate the qualities one usually associates with the role of the mother, that of providing nurture and care. Nancy Chodorow has given a thorough discussion of this tendency of the mother to reproduce the desire to mother in the daughter's mind. For details please refer to Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). From that angle, the mother culture will be fostering what that specific society considers as mothering qualities in the daughter, moulding them into future mothers. These explanations of what

daughter within the mother's body continues its course even beyond the maternal body, but the intervention of social conventions, different value systems, and particularly the resort to symbolic language, give rise to misunderstanding and misinterpretations on both sides. It is important to see that an individual's entrance into a community is marked by the sharing of a common language, just as the American-born daughters' socialisation means for them to use the same language as their peers. Yet it is equally significant to note that the American-born daughter comes from a Chinese mother and shares a language with her before acquiring her social language.

The ways in which mother and daughter respond to this linguistic struggle form the major body of texts discussed in this chapter. Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter*,[7] Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*,[8] Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*[9] and *The Hundred Secret Senses*[10] have at their heart the tension resulting from a head-on collision between mothers and daughters who have different cultural affiliations. Belonging to different genres, ranging from a self-claimed autobiography to autobiographical novel, these four narratives exploit various generic features to represent the personal struggles undergone by Chinese women living on the threshold of foreign and native land.

The variety in the nature of writing in terms of the degree of autobiographical details as well as the narrative structure controlling the writer-reader relationship is

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the term mother culture may represent are not meant to be exhaustive, but aim to explain some of the ways the term is employed in this study.

[7] Jade Snow Wong, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (London: Hurst and Blackett Ltd., 1952).

[8] Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (London: Picador, 1975).

[9] Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* (London: Minerva Books, 1989).

important in this chapter, not only where the categorical names used to label some narratives have been a subject for debate,[11] but the narrative technique is also significant in relation to the idea of this self-writing. That means that the process of deciding the genre of a text examined is already an act of understanding which may affect the way the text is perceived. On another level, the form of writing and the voice structuring the narrative flow may also uncover the picture of the narrator, which in the case of an autobiography will be one and the same as the subject described.

By calling a narrative an autobiography, the author has not only made a claim on the authenticity of the events and feelings recorded in the narrative, but is required to be responsible for keeping it as much to that status as possible. According to Philippe Lejeune's definition of an autobiography,[12] the narrator is also engaged in a process of reflecting upon his or her life. In other words, the person's life is shaped into a meaningful pattern during the process of narrative construction. Writing the life thus simultaneously transforms it into a meaningful structure, from the point of view of the narrator, in that particular moment in space and time. It is important to be aware of this specificity because the choice to write an autobiography marks a certain understanding of the person's current position in life, as seen in Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter*.[13]

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[10] Amy Tan, *The Hundred Secret Senses* (London: Flamingo, 1995).

[11] Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* has been the subject of debate concerning its nature. Although the subtitle to the book, "memoirs of a girlhood among ghosts," suggests a more "personal" nature of writing which can be autobiographical in nature, the mixture of myths, legends and magical narratives in the content of the book makes one wonder how authentic that personal experience can be.

[12] Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin, trans. Katherine Leary. Theory and History of Literature, vol. 52 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

[13] Many of the autobiographies centre on the turning point of one's life as the building block. The early autobiographies by famous leaders, intellectuals, and spiritual leaders in the West share this element of a marker of change. This shared status comes from the belief that autobiography has an essential value

In these four variously autobiographical narratives, the major means of communication between mother and daughter is the telling of stories. Of course, mothers are not the only ones who tell stories. What is special about the stories mother tells to daughter in the texts discussed here, is that they embody the wishes, desires, fears and personal outlook of the mother, and the transmission of these stories goes through a number of obstacles. Many times the stories end up distorted in terms not of the literal content, but the intended message. Given the heavily encoded meanings of the stories, the appropriation of their "original" meaning can result in a serious communication failure and this may have a fundamental impact on the way the daughter, who takes the position of the reader, perceives the mother and her own relationship to her. In that sense, the following narratives are also about the means and problematics of communication, either through the use of language, or other methods.

Identity is seldom a preconstructed fixture which remains stable all through a person's life, but is created on the site of mother-daughter communication through stories. It is, however, a much more indirect process than may be thought. The mother passes on to the daughter a digest of her already selected repertoire of stories from her own childhood, the process of transmission passes through the mother's search from memory, the choice of verbal signs, then the daughter receives those verbal signs and creates her own interpretation. Having gone through these stages of translation, it is no wonder that the version the daughter understands should be different from both the one the mother heard as a child, and the one she chooses to

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of didactic influence. The lives of these people are recorded because it was believed that by their influence the reading public may be taught a lesson or shown a way of personal improvement. For details about this strand of didactic autobiography, please refer to William Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980). Similarly, although Jade Snow was only twenty-five when she wrote the autobiography, it

deliver. Misunderstandings and free interpretation occur because of the cultural translation processes taking place in between.

What is important about this knowledge of the presence of translation is that the gap in between the different versions marks the points over which mothers and daughters can exercise their power of imagination and creativity. The storyteller is actively engaged with a definite purpose to her actions; but the listener (in this case the daughter) is also an active participant in the communication. As she listens, she has to use her existing knowledge to decode the message. The fact that the daughters in our narratives always understand a different story from the one the mothers tell proves the equal authority of the listener's position. While mothers are often seen as the only one giving in the relationship, what I want to show in the examination of the texts is that this is not so.

Daughters take from their mothers but they also give. Like Maxine in *The Woman Warrior*, daughters also respond to the hopes and fears communicated to them by the mothers' stories. The mother and daughter relationship is a subtle exchange of ideas and recognition of each other, at a woman-to-woman level. By virtue of the shared origin in the ancestor mother's body, these generations of women speak to and through each other via their telling, retelling and responding to the personal stories of their mothers, giving them new meanings every time in the retelling.

Marianne Hirsch in her book *The Mother/Daughter Plot*[14] mentions the overwhelming presence of the daughter's voice and a relative silence on the mother's

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marks an important turning point in her life, a point coupled with transformations in her parents' attitude to the cultural conflict between them.

[14] Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

part in literary representations. What I hope to show in this discussion is the input of the mother, not necessarily as the narrator in the framing narrative of the written texts, but still very much present and playing an important role in these daughter's voices too. In the following account, four texts by three different writers will be examined, all of them originally written in English, by American-born Chinese women.[15] The original language of the narratives is important for two reasons. First, since they are written in English, the primary target readers are those who read English, including American citizens, and all English readers around the world; second, in telling things about the mother and the mother's stories, which are in Chinese (or a dialect), the narrator is already making a translation, the process of which reveals the complexities of the cultural differences.

Not only in the language, but also in the critical reception of the book can one see the frequency of the cultural identity problem. In an essay written by the author about the reception of *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston discusses the major misreadings that white critics make of her book which does not aim to be history nor any mass representation of certain groups of people. The subject is the author, what she thinks, how she feels leading such a life in a country where people have different treatment for people of different colour. She quotes Michael T. Malloy, who argues

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[15]Maxine Hong Kingston has written on cultural stereotypes and impositions that critics have made with regard to her work and those of other American born writers. She is particularly critical concerning her writer's identity in relation to her cultural identity: "Another bothersome characteristic of the reviews is the ignorance of the fact that I am an American. I am an American writer, who, like other American writers, wants to write the great American novel. *The Woman Warrior* is an American book. (57-58)" Later in the same essay she claims that no matter how the person looks, once he/she is born in America, he/she is American automatically. In that case, the ethnic identity, Chinese for her, is only used to distinguish her from some other Asians who look similar and who are also born in America. It is only in situations when ethnicity is called into the focus of attention that their identity of being American needs a qualifier of their ethnicity. Throughout the essay she maintains that she is not going to conform to the "exotic" image that non-Chinese Americans want to put on her, and she insists that what she is writing is an American book because that is where she was born. For details, see "Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers," in *Asian and Western Writers in Dialogue: New Cultural Identities*, ed. by Guy Amirthanayagam (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), 55-65.

that: "The background is exotic, but the book is in the mainstream of American feminist literature."[16] Kingston criticises this comment because it represents a restrictive approach to writers who work across cultures. She says,

> To call a people exotic freezes us into the position of being always alien - politically a most sensitive point with us because of the long history in America of the Chinese Exclusion Acts, the deportations, the law denying us citizenship when we have been part of America since its beginning.[17]

It may be the reason why, according to Kingston, white readers pick "The White Tigers," the second story of her book, as their favourite, because the elements in the story come closest to what they have understood as the exotic "Chinese" culture. Kingston argues that she

> [puts] it at the beginning to show that the childish myth is past, not the climax we reach for. Also, 'The White Tigers' is not a Chinese myth but one transformed by America, a sort of kung fu movie parody.[18]

Here one can see the interesting play between the author and the reader's expectation in a context of cultural translation. Certain features, like the magical training of so-called warriors in an imaginary ancient China, are cultural images which do not have historical associations with a real China. What Kingston claims to have done is to pick and mix these features and put them into a form which will appeal to an audience looking for the exotic, in her words, the "kung fu movie parody," manipulating the audience's response by her knowledge of their expectations and her intention.

The phenomenon of representing an experience from a culture which is different from that of the target audience is always a challenging task, because of the difficulty in choosing an adequate language, and because of the problems which may be encountered in carrying out cultural translation, if that is possible at all. Once

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[16] Ibid., 56.

[17] Ibid., 57.

Chinese traditions are described in English, they immediately acquire a strangeness. New words may have to be coined to describe objects non-existent in the reader's culture. What is more confusing, however, is the difference in cultural value of certain objects even when the words are translatable in terms of symbolic signs. There are abundant examples in the texts, such as the different understanding of the role of candies between Maxine's mother and the foreign shopowner.[19]

The four texts discussed here are all by American born Chinese women, whose narratives are about women similar to themselves. Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* sets the scene by its depiction of an early picture of cultural conflict. Written in 1952, it is about her own life as a young woman born into a Chinese household influenced by Confucian tradition, who faces the struggle between American liberal thinking she receives through her education, and the strict Confucian teachings in her home. The fifth Chinese daughter finally embraces American individualism and insists on exploiting her own potential as far as she can. This turning to Americanism is, of course, a direct response to the unfair limitation Confucianism imposes on women. Times and social conditions have changed and her individual value as a person is now much more important than the fact that she is female. From this groundwork of how Jade Snow reacts to her mother culture, or more aptly, mother's culture, we are brought by *The Woman Warrior* to American Chinese communities in the late 1970s. Similar cultural conflicts take place, only this time the dominant figure is not the Confucian father, but the strong-willed mother,

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[18] Ibid.

[19] A delivery boy wrongly delivered some medicine to Maxine's household. Brave Orchid saw this as a curse on her family for someone to fall ill, and therefore asked Maxine to go to the pharmacist to claim some "reparation candy" to "stop the curse." But the shopowner thought Maxine was begging, so he have her left-over festival candies. See Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (London: Picador, 1975), 152-54.

who herself has gone through very unconventional experiences when she was a young woman in China.

The dominating mother does not make life any easier, though. Mother and daughter have too intense a bond with each other to resolve the fears, desires, and expectations between them easily. Each of them is only too eager to confirm herself in the other and this causes incomprehension and misunderstandings. Only through years of living apart when Maxine acquires the critical distance to re-view their relationship, and to tell her own stories, can she put herself in her mother's position and see her self in her mother and feel comfortable about the bond between them, despite all the other differences. The secret, like Kwan's one hundred secret senses, is no more than an awareness of things that she already possesses. Listening, remembering, and interpreting the stories that Brave Orchid has passed on to her for whatever reasons, Maxine is led to explore the realm of language and most importantly, the unexplored capacity the female body shares with it. With this understanding in mind, Maxine comes to share her mother's vastness in her story world, her story-telling voice a continuation of her mother's.

In *The Joy Luck Club* a gap is introduced at the beginning because Jing-mei's mother has died. She is told to take her mother's position at the mahjong table and later in China to meet her twin sisters who were unwillingly abandoned by her mother during the war. What follows in the book is a series of narratives from both mothers and daughters expressing their wishes towards each other in view of their past and present. Their stories twirl around each other, finally ending up with the trip to the Mainland as the climax of realisation. Neither words nor stories are needed at that moment because the blood that joins Jing-mei and her sisters together speaks louder than anything. Olivia literally finds herself in China again in *The Hundred Secret*

*Senses*. With the help of quasi-magical stories, Kwan brings her back to the point where everything starts. The trip to her father's native land not only makes sense to Olivia about all the stories that she has heard from Kwan, it also gives her new beginnings: a new beginning with Simon and a new life inside her body. The trip itself is a point in the vastness of the continuation of life and memories, perpetuated by the mother in the daughters.

*Fifth Chinese Daughter* by Jade Snow Wong can serve as a point of orientation and comparison for the other three narratives discussed in this chapter. Admittedly different from Amy Tan's and Kingston's narratives, it claims to be an authentic autobiography recording factual information about the author, namely the first twenty-four years of her young life. This attempt to register an authenticity can be confirmed by the Introduction and the author's note preceding the main text. The point of the writing is to present the story of an American-born Chinese girl, of "constant adjustments to the mingled American-Chinese influences,"[20] which can be compared to the fictional texts; besides, this narrative was written at a time when the proportion of Chinese in the United States was not so large and when the mingling of the two cultures was not that complete. Problems represented in this early stage of cultural mingling are resolved later in 1970s texts and no longer appear as issues needing attention. But juxtaposition of these representations is valuable because it denotes the different stages through which people come to reconcile with their orientation amidst the convergence of cultural practices. The depiction of ways of thinking, things people take for granted at different periods of this cultural mix, and what those beliefs reveal about their subjectivity come through the comparison.

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[20] Jade Snow Wong, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (London: Hurst and Blackett Ltd., 1952), 8.

The author's note gives an illuminating piece of information:

> Although a 'first person singular' book, this story is written in the third person from Chinese habit. The submergence of the individual is literally practised. In written Chinese, prose or poetry, the word 'I' almost never appears, but is understood. In corresponding with an older person like my father, I would write in words half the size of the regular ideographs, 'small daughter Jade Snow' when referring to myself; to one of contemporary age, I would put in small characters, 'younger sister' - but never 'I'. Should my father, who owes me no respect, write to me, he would still refer to himself in the third person, 'Father'. Even written in English, an 'I' book by a Chinese would seem outrageously immodest to anyone raised in the spirit of Chinese propriety.[21]

This introduction to the approach is needed not only because the target readers are probably an English-reading public with no idea at all of the way addresses imply people's social position, but because even Chinese people themselves are slowly abandoning this practice and may not be able to understand it without explanation. Readers who are familiar with the first person narratives *The Joy Luck Club, The Woman Warrior,* and *The Hundred Secret Senses*, may be so used to the first person narrator there that the submergence of the self here may give them a jolt. The value of the *Fifth Chinese Daughter* lies to some extent in this self-conscious difference between the Chinese and the American ways of seeing the self and the world, which might have been diluted as the interaction between the two cultures increases along with time. The submergence of the individual in a Confucian outlook has shaped the thought of the Chinese people for thousands of years, because the classic teachings have already laid down preset ways of behaviour for the people, so that individual decision is not a self-initiated act.[22] Understanding the rationale behind the practice

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[21] Ibid., 9.

[22] The hierarchical structure relating people to each other and giving them guidance as to how to behave in each specific relationship has been discussed in the introduction. Also refer to Liang Shuming 梁漱溟, *Zhongguo wenhua yaoyi* 中國文化要義 [Key Ideas of Chinese Culture] (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian (Hong Kong) youxian gongsi, 1987), to see how this ethical structure affects the Chinese in the way they see themselves.

points the way to an understanding of the identity crises these different characters go through in their environment.

Jade Snow, the narrator, opens the book by saying "When you drink water, think of its source,"[23] a remark typical of her father and also typical of Confucian training - using an old maxim to support and direct one's behaviour. It symbolises her journey from Chinatown in San Francisco to the outside world in American society, simultaneously a mental journey from basic Confucian training to an acceptance of a more liberal concept of American individuality. The very last sentence of the autobiography is a welcome by her much-changed parents: "It's good to have you home again!"[24] The open expression of affection and happiness shown by her parents in seeing Jade Snow here, is a big step from the beginning of the story when the father was the sole decision maker in the house, and did not approve of any open expression of personal feelings. In this way, the form in which the autobiography starts is self-referential, showing an awareness of the journey it will go through, as well as situating the experience of the fifth Chinese daughter firmly in the cultural conflicts faced by a Chinese-American.

Where is the source of Jade Snow's identity? Is it in her mother culture, and if so, is that Chinese, or American? The question is more complex than it seems. At one level, the indetermination between the Chinese and the American is caused by the special condition of her birth. She is ethnically Chinese but she was born in America, giving her a dual cultural allegiance. Yet at another level, the very term "mother culture" itself is ambiguous. Usually one's mother culture is one's "native" customs

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[23]Jade Snow Wong, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (London: Hurst and Blackett Ltd., 1952), 9. In Chinese, the characters are "yin shui si yuan" 飲水思源. It is a saying to remind people not to be ungrateful. When they enjoy any privilege or help, they should always think of the one who offers.

[24] Ibid., 256.

and beliefs, signifying one's links to the place where one was born, or where one's ancestors were born. In the Chinese clan system, one's ancestors were the forefathers - people going back on the father's side - and not foremothers. In that sense, one's mother culture is actually the father's culture, because one's lineage is counted on the father's side only. Yet, with the father being the authority, "mother culture" and "mother tongue" are still exercising enormous power over the formation and realisation of individual orientations. The deeper these characters try to look into their orientation, the more obvious it is to them that there is no getting away from the mother in her various incarnations.

The puzzles of life's meaning start almost at the beginning of life. Jade Snow and her siblings are told to observe the strictest discipline from their earliest childhood; her parents do not hesitate to punish them whenever their behaviour is found "improper" according to the formalities they were taught, yet

> life was a constant puzzle. No one ever troubled to explain. Only through punishment did she learn that what was proper was right and what was improper was wrong.[25]

Even after the punishment, she still does not understand the reason behind the standards used to judge their behaviour. Nothing is explained. One is reminded of Maxine's complaints about her mother; she says her mother never explains the customs and rituals to her, yet assumes that she would pass them on. Young Maxine can find no confirmation of the "truth" of these customs, and concludes that they must have been inventing the set of practices anew from generation to generation. This feeling of frustration about the unresolvability of these puzzles is actually the beginning of the emergence of an individual in the speaker. Jade Snow's parents

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[25] Ibid., 13.

never explain them because the inherited wisdom has been proved correct in the past and has stood the test of thousands of years.

Readers of Jade Snow's autobiography may wonder whether the maxims will still work in a different historical and social context. In fact life experiences put her into a situation where she is acutely aware of the need to ask the same question. Differences in the external American society become stimulations urging her to compare and question, and once she starts questioning, she has to seek explanations to fulfill her desires to make sense of the picture to herself. It is exactly this need to create an acceptable version of the truth that contributes to the growth of one's understanding, of which the autobiography is a record, and is also the reason why this exploration of the formation of the feminine self has to start with a cross-cultural study of personal stories.

The first "external" stimulation comes from school. When she is six, her father puts her in an American national elementary school. It is an important point in her life, not only because she receives some external training, but also because she will have to accept another authority in her life. Her parents say to her on her first day of school:

> Jade Snow, at school a teacher will be in charge, who is as your mother or your father at home. She is supreme, and her position in all matters pertaining to your education is as indisputable as the decisions of your mother or father at home. Respect her accordingly.[26]

The fact that the instruction has to come from her parents is important. So far in her life the only source of authority comes from her parents (more from her father) and even outside the realm of the family, it is still the head of the family who gives her permission to heed another person's advice. Although the teacher is said to be "in

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[26] Ibid., 22-23.

charge," her position is limited to the school and to matters about education, moreover this authority is granted to the teacher only by the consent of the parents. There is no shifting of power from the parents to the teacher at all, because it is the parent's decision to let her listen to the teacher. Therefore it comes as no surprise later when Jade Snow develops more liberal ideas and explores her individuality, her father threatens to stop her from going to school. He thinks he has the right to stop her because the authority of the school body is only given by his consent.

In traditional China, daughters were either prevented from having an education or their education was restricted to the areas in which they were to fulfil their roles as a wife and mother. For them to fill that role, the things needed were not book knowledge, but more practical skills in household management instead. When explaining to Jade Snow why he puts her in a Chinese evening school on top of her elementary education, her father says:

> Many Chinese were very short-sighted. They felt that since their daughters would marry into a family of another name, they would not belong permanently in their own family clan. Therefore, they argued that it was not worthwhile to invest in their daughters' book education. But my answer was that since sons and their education are of primary importance, we must have intelligent mothers. If nobody educates his daughters, how can we have intelligent mothers for our sons? If we do not have good family training, how can China be a strong nation?[27]

Jade Snow's father is not very different from his fellow-men after all, because he sees the position of daughters and women in the house in the same way. His seemingly liberal gesture of giving her an education is only a different method of achieving the same end. Here we see the source of the split in directions of thought between Jade Snow and her father. While the father sees education as transmission of information, the American understanding of education emphasises equally independent and critical thinking. Since everyone is different, each will have different needs and decisions,

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[27] Ibid., 24-25.

and thus education is at the same time making one realise the fact and helping one to fulfill the individual needs. The arguments later between father and Jade Snow come from the ideological difference in their concept of education. Education in the American sense is not just a direct translation of education in the Chinese sense.

When Jade Snow asks her father to sponsor her pursuit of a university education, the answer from her father embodies what the Chinese principles have laid down for their women:

> Jade Snow, you have been given an above-average Chinese education for an American-born Chinese girl. You now have an average education for an American girl. I must still provide with all my powers for your Older Brother's advanced medical training.[28]

The answer reveals not only the double standard of treating sons and daughters, but more significantly the father's awareness of their Chinese identity surrounded by American realities. Jade Snow, however, is only thinking of the importance of an "American advanced education" to herself, because she is much more steeped in the individualism encouraged and nurtured by the American education system. The transferral, or translation, slowly working in her subjectivity, is already seen in her inability to agree totally with her father as she used to do before.

This tug-of-war between father and daughter continues in other areas of life. Determined to get an education for herself, Jade Snow works part-time to support herself; she starts to stand at a distance from her father's teachings and ask questions; she notices things that she did not notice before, and one of the most dramatic turning points in her observation is the imminent birth of the young brother when she was twenty. Her much older mother is pregnant yet again, but she works and contributes to the operation of the household as usual despite her condition. The mother's

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[28] Ibid., 121.

pregnancy is not mentioned in the family, as usual, but Jade Snow feels uncomfortable about it:

> As a young woman of twenty, she suddenly felt pity for another woman who was working away her life almost by compulsion, who was receiving little affection from her very children for whose welfare she was working; because affection had not been part of her training, and she did not give it in training her own. As if a veil separating her from her mother were lifted for a moment, Jade Snow saw clearly that at this time Mamma did not need from her grown daughter the respect which she had fostered in all her children so much as she needed the companionship which only one woman can give another.[29]

Jane Snow is able to stand back and look at her mother as an individual human being who needs something which her culture is not able to provide. It shows Jade Snow's critical insight into the inadequacies of Chinese traditional training of not showing affection openly. She also sees the need for her to step out of the Chinese social hierarchy, from being a subordinate daughter, to claim the independence of an individual human being for both herself and her mother. It is a long journey from elementary school where once when she hurt herself in a ball game, the teacher hugged her to give her comfort. The close and spontaneous physical contact given to her by the teacher was very much a surprise to her young mind:

> she was now conscious the 'foreign' American ways were not only generally and vaguely different from their Chinese ways, but that they were specifically different, and the specific differences would involve a choice of action. Jade Snow had begun to compare American ways with those of her mother and father, and the comparison made her uncomfortable.[30]

From observations and comparisons, she has moved to analysis and the ability to a personal choice, which spells her graduation to the building of her individuality, her "American" self.

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[29] Ibid., 194-95.

[30] Ibid., 31.

The last sentence of the autobiography, a welcome from her parents and other family members, symbolises Jade Snow's success in achieving the goal she sets out to achieve, to prove herself worthy of her family's pride. It is at the same time a sign of another achievement: the change in her parents' attitude is a manifestation of a fundamental metamorphosis in their value system. By her own success, Jade Snow shows to her parents that there is an alternative to what they hold true, and moreover that the alternative brings pride to the family. Having been mothered by her Chinese family, she reciprocates by daughtering them. Her response to her parents' teaching is a great accomplishment because it brings out the inherent potential in them. They have travelled a long way with her, finally transgressing the barrier in expressing their intimacy to each other.

The birth of her youngest brother proves to be a breakthrough experience for them all. The doctor attending Jade Snow's mother says, "I think a man little realizes what pain a woman endures" when Jade's mother is awaiting delivery. The father is brought into the room to witness the miraculous process of birth taking place:

> Daddy and Mamma said nothing to each other. Mamma turned away her face and cried out fitfully. In a gesture she had never before witnessed, Jade Snow saw Daddy take Mamma's hand in both of his, and a tear dropped on her coverlet. Then he turned and went out.[31]

To her father who never makes the slightest gesture of affection to the children and his own wife, this holding of hands and the shedding of tears openly in front of total strangers is a breakthrough from his rigid modesty. When he knows that he has another son, he is almost dancing in the hospital, in front of his family. He is still basically governed by the principles of Confucian classic behaviour, but he is open to alternatives, in this case a more liberal alternative brought to him by his American-

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[31] Ibid., 196.

educated daughter Jade Snow. Not only does Jade Snow grow under the guidance of her parents, but her parents also progress with her feedback.

The willingness to accept an alternative behaviour and reasoning can also be seen in another seemingly ordinary but meaning-laden act by her father. Jade Snow brings home a girl friend as a guest, contrary to what was permitted in the house before, and the friend "proves" herself so sincerely interested in Chinese culture that she asks if Jade Snow's father will give her a Chinese name. Name-giving in the Chinese mind represents the parental hopes for the child, symbolises the way this person is linked to the entire clan, and some even believe, affects the fate of the person. Name-giving is therefore not to be taken lightly in a Chinese family, but Jade Snow's father responds positively to the request and happily takes out his gigantic dictionary to do so. What is surprising is not only that he concurs with the request, but that he includes the girl in his family by giving her the same middle name as his own daughters - "Jade." Through the inclusion of a foreigner to his family via the shared name, the Wongs affirm their willingness to interact with an alternative system of values.

Due also to the significance of a name, *The Woman Warrior* begins with the expulsion of a woman from the family history, a woman who is deprived of her name, thus of her existence, not to say her individuality. The "no name aunt" has no name and no body in the memory of her family because she had given birth to an illegitimate baby and disgraced her family. In return for this crime, her name is not mentioned, as if she had not been born at all. The irony of the story, however, lies in the fact that though the non-existent woman is referred to as "the no-name," she is given a name in the very process of denial. The occasion is full of contradictions. Maxine's mother wants to tell Maxine a cautionary story, and she starts by "you must

not tell," barring the possibility of Maxine telling anyone the same story, yet at the same time raising the legitimacy of this telling. The purpose of a cautionary tale like this is to give warnings to the younger generation as to the permissible and impermissible in life. In this particular case, Brave Orchid says, "Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don't humiliate us."[32] This shows the specific function of this story, a marker of the new stage of life Maxine has entered with the beginning of her menstruation, as well as presenting to her a new realm of existence - sexuality - which is strictly controlled in the culture.

The effect of this telling, however, is the creation of doubt in Maxine's mind. Although Brave Orchid is trying to teach Maxine something, she does so by doing the very thing she herself forbids Maxine to do, namely to tell. Her act defeats her purpose. With this contradiction, Maxine is confused about the point of the story.[33] Savouring the details of the no name aunt's experience, she thinks of different possible pictures of what her aunt is like:

> My aunt could not have been the lone romantic who gave up everything for sex. Women in the old China did not choose. Some man had commanded her to lie with him and be his secret evil.[34]
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> Perhaps she had encountered him in the fields or on the mountain where the daughters-in-law collected fuel. Or perhaps he first noticed her in the marketplace.[35]

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[32] Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (London: Picador, 1975), 13.

[33] "Stories are often used to instruct, thus contributing to the perpetuation of cultural traditions, rather than their modification. The cautionary tale of No Name Woman in *The Woman Warrior* would illustrate how Chinese mothers use stories to emphasize the consequences of non-conformity. What is particularly interesting about Kingston's attitude to and handling of this story is the fact that she is obviously dissatisfied with the identity attributed to the woman in the Chinese story, and re-interprets it from alternative perspectives to create optional romantic or oppressed identities. (52)" That is to say, Brave Orchid clearly has an agenda in her mind when she chooses to tell Maxine this story, but the interpretation of the story in a different cultural context can lead to something very different in its reception. Barbara Blair, "Textual Expressions of the Search for Cultural Identity," *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 27:1 (1995), 48-63.

[34] Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (London: Picador, 1975), 14.

> It could very well have been, however, that my aunt did not take subtle enjoyment of her friend, but, a wild woman, kept rollicking company. Imagining her free with sex doesn't fit, though. I don't know any women like that, or men either. Unless I see her life branching into mine, she gives me no ancestral help.[36]

It does not matter whether the real no name aunt coincides with the images Maxine has conjured up in her mind. The importance of this cautionary tale lies in the stimulation it gives Maxine about the individuality of one woman. Instead of planting a fear of individualism, a caution about her burgeoning sexuality, Brave Orchid's tale serves to instigate an attractive picture of a rebel against social etiquette in Maxine. From the various pictures she imagines about the aunt, and moreover the way she links her to herself, Maxine undergoes a process of self-creation through listening to and constructing parts of the stories.

There are varying opinions concerning the genre of *The Woman Warrior*: a different kind of autobiography, autobiographical fiction, or fiction.[37] Kingston uses

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., 16.

[37] There has not been actually a debate as such about the genre of literature that *The Woman Warrior* may belong to, but critics do use different terms when referring to it. A lot of them see it as a kind of autobiography: Victoria Myers in "The Significant Fictivity of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," *Biography*, 9:2 (1986), 112-25. Bonnie Melchior's "A Marginal 'I': The Autobiography Self Deconstructed in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," *Biography*, 17:3 (1994), 281-95, though she does move on to talk about how Kingston breaks the assumptions readers have about autobiographies one by one; Catherine Lappas in "'The way I heard it was ...' Myth, Memory, and Autobiography in *Storyteller* and *The Woman Warrior*," *Critic*, 57:1 (1994), 57-67; Leilani Nishime in "Engendering Genre: Gender and Nationalism in *China Men* and *The Woman Warrior*," *MELUS*, 20:1 (1995), 67-82, also seeks to explore how Kingston tries to break the grand narrative of ethnic autobiography while using the same conventions; Shirley Geoklin Lim sees *The Woman Warrior* as part of the tradition of Chinese American women's autobiography in America, as discussed in her article, "The Tradition of Chinese American Women's Life Stories: Thematics of Race and Gender in Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," *American Women's Autobiography*, ed. by Margo Culley (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 252-67. Cynthia Sauling Wong clarifies *The Woman Warrior* as immigrant autobiography in her discussion "Immigrant Autobiography: Some Questions of Definition and Approach," in *American Autobiography: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. by John Paul Eakin (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 142-70. Sarah Gilead's "Emigrant Selves: Narrative Strategies in Three Women's Autobiographies' in *Criticism*, 30:1 (1988), 43-62; April R. Komenaka's "Autobiography as a Sociolinguistic Resource: Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 69 (1988), 105-18; Cheung Kingkok, "Self-fulfilling Visions in *The Woman Warrior* and *Thousand Pieces of Gold*," *Biography*, 13:2 (1990),

a mixture of different styles in the composition of the book, making it a hybrid and a linguistic cocktail. If we see *Fifth Chinese Daughter* as a tug-of-war between Confucian tradition and American liberalism, then *The Woman Warrior* is a site of many forces fighting for domination. There is certainly a Chinese element as represented by the teachings of the mother, the stories she carries with her from China, and the rituals and customs she practises in the household. Also present is the impact of American society: the education, the neighbours and the influence of the general society which are foregrounded much more here than in *Fifth Chinese Daughter.* Within the framework constructed by these elements, human interference is much more active, thus bringing these forces into closer contact with each other. It is no longer a simple combat between two sides of the field, but a battle in which the different sides have shed their uniforms, making it impossible to have a clearer boundary among them, resulting in a continual regrouping and redefinition of relationships.

This aspect is best illustrated in both the subject matter and the language used in the book. Brave Orchid tells her stories in Chinese, and Maxine learns the language

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143-53; Suzanne Juhasz in "Narrative Technique and Female Identity," *Contemporary American Women Writers: Narrative Strategies*, eds. Catherine Rainwater and William J. Scheick (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985) even calls *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* together as a two-volume autobiography; and Linda Morante in "From Silence to Song: The Triumph of Maxine Hong Kingston," *Frontiers*, 9:2 (1987), 78-82. A few people use the term "autobiographical" to describe this narrative, among them Cheng Lok Chua in "Golden Mountain: Chinese Versions of the American Dream in Lin Yutang, Louis Chu, and Maxine Hong Kingston," *Ethnic Groups*, 4:1-2 (1982), 33-59; Shirley K. Rose, "Metaphors and Myths of Cross-Cultural Literacy: Autobiographical Narratives by Maxine Hong Kingston, Richard Rodriguez, and Malcolm X," *MELUS*, 14:1 (1987), 3-15; and Bobby Fong in "Maxine Hong Kingston's Autobiographical Strategy in *The Woman Warrior*," *Biography*, 12:2 (1989), 116-26. Only a few others choose to call it a fictional narrative, among whom are Carol Mitchell, who calls it a novel, in her "'Talking story' in *The Woman Warrior*: An Analysis of the Use of Folklore," *Kentucky Folklore Record*, 27:1-2 (1981), 5-12; Marlene Goldman in "Naming the Unspeakable: The Mapping of Female Identity in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," *International Women's Writing: New Landscapes of Identity*, ed. Anne E. Brown and Marjanne E. Goozé (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), 223-32. A number of them also make it an issue to discuss what category should this book belong to: Sue Ann Johnston, "Empowerment Through Mythological Imaginings in *Woman Warrior*," *Biography*, 16:2 (1993), 136-43, Elizabeth J. Ordóñez in "Narrative Texts By Ethnic Women: Rereading The Past, Reshaping The Future," *MELUS*, 9:3 (1982), 19-28.

as she listens. The problem, however, comes from her attempt to translate them into English and incorporate them into her American life. To her, her "American life has been such a disappointment."[38] Her failure in applying the heroic stories about Chinese women to her contemporary American life makes it difficult for her to situate herself. Like Alice in Wonderland, she finds the rules and beliefs in one land not applicable to another, and she has to constantly shift herself between these contrastive realms without due warning, lost in time, space, and different levels of reality.

"White Tigers," the second episode of the book, is a powerful manifestation of this process. At the beginning of the episode, there is an account of a young girl's experience of getting away from home and learning martial arts from an old couple in remote lands:

> The call would come from a bird that flew over our roof. In the brush drawings it looks like the ideograph for 'human', two black wings. The bird would cross the sun and lift into the mountains (which look like the ideograph 'mountain'), there parting the mist briefly that swirled opaque again. I would be a little girl of seven the day I followed the bird away into the mountains. The brambles would tear off my shoes and the rocks cut my feet and fingers, but I would keep climbing, eyes upward to follow the bird. We would go around and around the tallest mountain, climbing ever upward. I would drink from the river, which I would meet again and again. We would go so high the plants would change, and the river that flows past the village would become a waterfall. At the height where the bird used to disappear, the clouds would grey the world like an ink wash.[39]

This is in itself a collage of several elements from different cultural backgrounds. The big bird and the account of this exceptional birth come from the story of the legendary Yue Fei,[40] a famous general in the Sung Dynasty, reputed for his loyalty to the

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[38] Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (London: Picador, 1975), 47.

[39] Ibid., 26.

[40] Yue Fei 岳飛 was a Sung general, famed for his fight against the Jin Barbarians. His life was legendary from his birth. It was said that when he was born, a big bird flew over the roof of the house, so his middle name is Peng Ju 鵬舉. When he was grown, the Sung government was enlisting soldiers to defend the country, but because his old mother was widowed, he did not want to go. Yet his patriotic spirit was seen by his mother, so she urged him to go, and she used her sewing needles to engrave "jing

country, but was finally unjustly executed because of a plot. The idea of self-improvement can be found in martial arts fiction about olden China, with the figure of the hermit who has miraculous skills and who shows up only when there are great needs in the country. These are mixed with the story of another legendary figure Fa Mu Lan,[41] interwoven with invented details, plus the voice of an idiosyncratic personality, Maxine, and translated into contemporary American English, and set in contrast with the daily life of a young girl in North America. The levels of understanding required here make demands on how and where readers should place themselves in relation to Maxine's narrative.

This is also the problem of Maxine, the narrator. To be born in a Chinese household in American society is complicated enough without the mother sending incomprehensible messages to her about her identity:

> My mother told [other stories] that followed swordswomen through woods and palaces for years. Night after night my mother would talk-story until we fell asleep. I couldn't tell where the stories left off and the dreams began, her voice the voice of the heroines in my sleep.[42]

The Chinese myths do not encourage identification because their meanings are not explained. As in Jade Snow's house, the Chinese practices are taken for granted.

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zhong bao guo" 精忠報國 on his back to remind him of his duty to his country. He was a big success fighting the enemies, but Qin Hui 秦檜, the minister then, conspired to kill him and succeeded. Yue Fei died when he was thirty-nine.

[41] Fa Mu Lan (花木蘭 Hua Mulan in pinyin) was from a military family in North Wei. She learned the skills of martial arts from her father at a very young age, and became even more skilled than he. The barbarians from the North invaded China and the King enlisted people to defend the country. Since the enemies were really ferocious, the age limit was lifted to accommodate more people. Mu Lan's father, as a result, was also drafted. She thought long and hard, and decided to cross-dress as a man and enlist in place of her aged father. She went and because of her skills in martial arts, was chosen as a front-line commander. She fought for her country for twelve years, winning a lot of battles and finally defeating the barbarians. When she returned home, the King received her and wanted to give her prizes and titles, but the only thing she wanted was to be allowed to go home and serve her parents. Once she went home, she changed back into her female clothes and entertained her army friends, it was only then that these men knew they had been fighting with a woman for twelve years.

[42] Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (London: Picador, 1975), 25.

Maxine is frustrated because she has nowhere to turn but to her own imagination and observation. True to her name, Brave Orchid is a figure of unconventional courage: she was daring enough to lie about her age in order to study to be a doctor, daring enough to stay in a haunted room overnight and fight with a ghost, brave enough to demand fair treatment for her sister Moon Orchid from her husband, and moreover brave enough to insist on her Chinese ways in a foreign land. Her courage finds a role model in the stories she tells Maxine:

> Instantly I remembered that as a child I had followed my mother about the house, the two of us singing about how Fa Mu Lan fought gloriously and returned alive from war to settle in the village.[43]

The importance of the Fa Mu Lan story lies not only in the historical role she has played, but the vision that she represents for Brave Orchid and in turn for Maxine. The fact that Brave Orchid chooses the chant of Fa Mu Lan to teach Maxine could be an apt illustration of her expectations for her daughter. Yet physical courage is not all.

Brave Orchid's expertise in language manipulation, manifested in her skilful story-telling, is also translated into a similar skill in Maxine. The legacy of this linguistic agility is fundamental to the negotiation of her identity here in a hybrid cultural environment. The Fa Mu Lan story, plus the Yue Fei story, which must have been told to her by her mother, are translated into one unified story with other elements in Maxine's consciousness. The importance of that translation can be seen in the final form it takes in Maxine's narration, Yue Fei's "jing zhong bao guo," pierced with needles on his back, turn into a ritual with quite different meanings:

> My mother washed my back as if I had left for only a day and were her baby yet. 'We are going to carve revenge on your back,' my father said. 'We'll write out oaths and names.' ... My father first brushed the words in ink, and they fluttered

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[43] Ibid., 25-26.

> down my back row after row. Then he began cutting; to make fine lines and points he used thin blades, for the stems large blades.[44]

The four characters on Yue Fei's back were to remind him of his mission, but Maxine does not have any idea of what names are on her back. The words themselves mean nothing to her, but the act does - "if I got killed, the people could use my dead body for a weapon."[45] While Yue Fei is empowered by his mother's loyalty to their country, Maxine is empowered by the act of carving oaths and names on her body. The cuts release the blood, flowing from the many wounds. Maxine, the woman warrior in this section is powerful not only physically, but also theoretically, through the flow of blood, the flow of milk to feed her baby on the battle field, and on top of it the flow of her menstrual blood which symbolises the source of her power, her life-giving ability and her creativity.[46]

The way historical figures and stories are changed to tell Maxine's personal story also marks the period of its composition. Heroic figures from the Chinese abound, but the choice of Yue Fei, whose back is pierced, shows a particular feminist agenda related to the female body. The flow of blood from the wounded back is juxtaposed with the flow of menstrual blood, making the life-creating female body on a par with the hero who gives his life for his country. Jade Snow also refers a lot to old Chinese wisdom, but the use she makes of it and the obviously feminist-oriented

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[44] Ibid., 38.

[45] Ibid.

[46] The so-called French Feminisms refer to a group of feminists schooled in Freud and Lacan. They retain the language of psychoanalysis but reverse its sexual hierarchy. Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous are often seen as the representatives in the English language world. Among their many beliefs, Cixous sees women's writing as a performance of resistance, using "metaphors of the body" whuch exhibit the extravagance of feminine sexuality as resistance to the common sense codes of patriarchal writing. Luce Irigaray shares a similar poetics in her writing, what she calls "womenspeak" whose source is the female body. The flow of fluids in women's bodies, for example, is seen to symbolise creativity, as in the mother's life-giving body.

incorporation Kingston makes of Chinese stories indicates the twenty-year gap when cultural identity exploration has taken note of feminist movements.

The same awareness of cultural change can be seen in the tongue-cutting issue. Maxine complains:

> Maybe that's why my mother cut my tongue. She pushed my tongue up and sliced the fraenum. Or maybe she snipped it with a pair of nail scissors. I don't remember her doing it, only her telling me about it, but all during childhood I felt sorry for the baby whose mother waited with scissors or knife in hand for it to cry - and then, when its mouth was wide open like a baby bird's, cut.[47]

Young Maxine has mixed feelings about this act. She is sympathetic to the poor baby, yet proud and frightened at times:

> Sometimes I felt very proud that my mother committed such a powerful act upon me. At other times I was terrified - the first thing my mother did when she saw me was to cut my tongue.[48]

Maxine is not sure how to interpret it. For Brave Orchid says:

> I cut it so that you would not be tongue-tied. Your tongue would be able to move in any language. You'll be able to speak languages that are completely different from one another. You'll be able to pronounce anything. Your fraenum looked too tight to do those things, so I cut it.[49]

The act does not carry a standard meaning. Maxine responds with a maxim, "a ready tongue is an evil," although it sounds exactly like the kind of thing her mother believes in, Brave Orchid replies that "[things] are different in this ghost country."[50] The mother is not blind to the cultural difference between the home country and the place where they have settled. This conversational exchange shows mother's and daughter's awareness of cultural conflicts.

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[47] Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (London: Picador, 195), 147-48.

[48] Ibid., 148.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

The same event is given two interpretations from two different perspectives, both of which recognise the power of language. Brave Orchid herself is portrayed as an expert on talk-stories, and she brings up Maxine by teaching her to tell these stories. From her old Chinese background, Brave Orchid comes to understand that the subtle art of using language and an active imagination are the most important survival skills; for being in a position of disenfranchisement, the most effective resistance is a re-interpretation of what is laid down as rules. What Brave Orchid has done for Maxine is to provide her with the raw material on which to build her own stories, stories that will foster her imagination and which will give her enough space to define a unique personal ground. The power of language is the focus of Brave Orchid's legacy to Maxine, and this power comes from the female body.

Affinity between the female body and language has been the focus of écriture féminine.[51] Maxine's memoirs show that ethnic difference does not take away the power of language inherent in the minority female body in contemporary American society. Maxine's narratives seek to illustrate the attempt patriarchal society makes to control it: the cautionary tale of the no name aunt is a warning to keep the sexual body from emerging, the Fa Mu Lan story is one of personal success due to disguising the female body, and a frequent reminder that it's better "to raise geese than girls"[52] is also dismissive about the female body. Yet the restrictions and wounds on the female body only reveal it to be a source of power, the flow symbolising the unstoppable

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[51] Écriture féminine is a resistant form of writing, practised by French feminists such as Hélène Cixous. In principle this writing creates another space outside of patriarchal writing, operating on the metaphors of the feminine body and its extravagant sexuality in contrast to reason and common sense which are the guiding principles of patriarchal writing. Luce Irigaray is often discussed alongside Cixous, who has a similar poetics in her writing, which she calls "womanspeak." Definition from Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore eds., *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989).

[52] Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (London: Picador, 1975), 48.

movement of life-force, the flow of language and its possibilities without being pressed down by outward limitations.

Brave Orchid herself provides the best illustration of the power of the body and belief in its indestructibility. During her study at the To Keung School of Midwifery, she acquires a reputation as a shaman by staying overnight in a haunted room to do her examination revision. Investment in the multi-meaning of "ghost" empowers the representation of this episode. Ghosts can refer to ethnic Americans, an Other to the ethnic Chinese identity of the narrator, and ghosts are also the spirits which are said to be what is left when people die. The combat between Brave Orchid and the ghost is therefore two-fold. On the one hand she is testing her courage, and on the other hand this story can be seen as a parallel to her later life in America, where there is still a fight with foreign bodies, and all she has is her bodily existence and her unwavering belief in the power of language:

> 'I do not give in,' she said. 'There is no pain you can inflict that I cannot endure. You're wrong if you think I'm afraid of you. You're no mystery to me. I've heard of you Sitting Ghosts before. Yes, people have lived to tell about you. You kill babies, you cowards. You have no power over a strong woman. You are no more dangerous than a nesting cat. My dog sits on my feet more heavily than you can. You think this is suffering? I can make my ears ring louder by taking aspirin. Are these all the tricks you have, Ghost? Sitting and ringing? That is nothing. A Broom Ghost can do better. You cannot even assume an interesting shape. Merely a boulder. A hairy butt boulder. You must not be a ghost at all. Of course. There are no such things as ghosts.[53]

Unable to move, Brave Orchid only has language as her weapon. Words carry all the power she has in tackling the physical force of the Sitting Ghost. She threatens, she belittles, she dismisses and she stresses her endurance, and the last sentence is an outright erasure of the ghost's existence, just as they treat the disgraced aunt in their family. Language and body are again linked. The last sentence she says to the ghost

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[53] Ibid., 68.

before she returns to her study is: "Yes, when I get my oil, I will fry you for breakfast."[54] The idea of incorporating the body of one's enemy into oneself as a sign of total and complete victory is a very revealing Chinese belief. Even after the period of cannibalism, Chinese culture still keeps this idea of ingesting a relevant part of an animal's body into one's own to strengthen oneself, to "compensate the like with the like."[55]

The ultimate triumph that Brave Orchid can have over the Sitting Ghost is not only the elimination of its existence, but also its incorporation into her own body. Maxine cannot verify whether her mother actually wins the battle against the ghost, but she says:

> I see that my mother won in ghost battle because she can eat anything - quick, pluck out the carp's eyes, one for Mother and one for Father. All heroes are bold towards food.[56]

The conclusion she draws from the legendary stories of big eaters is that "Big eaters win."[57] The physical body is powerful because it takes things in, solid things which help to strengthen one's endurance. If the physical does not apply, or is not available to help, then Brave Orchid falls back on her prowess in language. We see the reassertion of the body into the identity of these women, as well as their power of manipulating the flow of language, just as the flow of their bodily fluids can symbolise an inherent flexibility. This coordination of the body and language in the

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[54] Ibid., 69.

[55] "To compensate the like with the like," in Chinese it is 以形補形. The Chinese believes that different organs in the body need different kinds of nutrients, that is why they will eat an equivalent part of another animal, believing that it can compensate for the loss of energy or power in a particular part of the human body.

[56] Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (London: Picador, 1975), 83-84.

[57] Ibid., 85.

woman warrior is successfully handed down to the next generation. Maxine becomes a story-teller like her mother, moreover, her stories are a continuation of her mother's: "The beginning is hers, the ending, mine."[58] Although the linguistic translation may not always work, the mother-daughter translation of experience does.

*The Joy Luck Club* is organised in a series of such mother-daughter translations. Jing-mei, the narrator of the frame story, is embarking on a real physical journey at the end of the novel to see her twin sisters in China, while psychologically the trip is a quest of herself through her mother. The other members of the club are similarly engaged in an attempt to the other side of the umbilical cord. To Waverly, the link with her mother takes on the image of a chess game:

> In my head, I saw a chessboard with sixty-four black and white squares. Opposite me was my opponent, two angry black slits. She wore a triumphant smile. 'Strongest wind cannot be seen,' she said.[59]

Waverly visualises her mother as an angry opponent in a chess game, one who is always competing with her. When Lindo withdraws her support for her daughter's chess-playing, Waverly responds by a strategic move:

> After many days had gone by in silence, I sat in my room, staring at the sixty-four squares of my chessboard, trying to think of another way. And that's when I decided to quit playing chess.[60]

What Waverly does not expect is the absence of any sign of interest on Lindo's part when she resumes playing after a time.

The success and failure over the chess champion venture is crucial for Waverly because the imaginary rivalry between her and her mother persists in her

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[58] Ibid., 184.

[59] Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* (London: Minerva, 1989), 100.

[60] Ibid., 171.

mind well into adulthood. She wants to tell Lindo her intended marriage with Rich, but she has misgivings:

> And even if I recognized her strategy, her sneak attack, I was afraid that some unseen speck of truth would fly into my eye, blur what I was seeing and transform him from the divine man I thought he was into someone quite mundane, mortally wounded with tiresome habits and irritating imperfections.[61]

She is afraid that her mother's comments will contaminate her ideal even in her own eyes, for her mother's influence over her is inescapable. There is almost no difference between the physically mature Waverly and the ten-year old girl who could not win anymore because her mother did not show interest in her game. Yet it will be too simple to see this as a relationship between a totalitarian mother and a submissive daughter, because the feeling of winning does appeal to the young Waverly:

> I could create barriers to protect myself that were invisible to my opponents. And this gift gave me supreme confidence. I knew what my opponents would do, move for move. I knew at exactly what point their faces would fall when my seemingly simply and childlike strategy would reveal itself as a devastating and irrevocable course. I loved to win.[62]

Waverly loves to win, but with her mother there is nothing she can do to have this satisfaction. When she fails to elicit the desired response from her mother about her fiancé, Waverly complains to her mother's genuine surprise:

> 'Ai-ya, why do you think these bad things about me?' Her face looked old and full of sorrow. 'So you think your mother is this bad. You think I have a secret meaning. But it is you who has this meaning. Ai-ya! She thinks I am this bad!'[63]

Lindo's denial of bad thoughts about this intended marriage not only does not give Waverly any comfort, instead she says, "I felt as if I had lost a battle, but one that I

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[61] Ibid., 173-74.

[62] Ibid., 170.

[63] Ibid., 181.

didn't know I had been fighting. I was weary."[64] The irony is that the battle she thinks she has been fighting all her life against her mother is non-existent, only her mother's intervention awakes her to the truth:

> I saw what I had been fighting for: It was for me, a scared child, who had run away a long time ago to what I had imagined was a safer place. And hiding in this place, behind my invisible barriers, I knew what lay on the other side: Her side attacks. Her secret weapons. Her uncanny ability to find my weakest spots. But in the brief instant that I had peered over the barriers I could finally see what was really there: an old woman, a wok for her armor, a knitting needle for her sword, getting a little crabby as she waited patiently for her daughter to invite her in.[65]

Waverly is actually fighting herself, alone, shut in her imaginary world, and most importantly, cut off from the support that her mother's lineage is giving her. Seeing the real picture, she heads towards the other side of the chessboard and joins her mother.

The mother, having crossed over daughterhood, sees the dilemma of the young woman more clearly. Ying-Ying St. Clair sees her own story repeated in her daughter:

> She and I have shared the same body. There is a part of her mind that is part of mine. But when she was born, she sprang from me like a slippery fish, and has been swimming away ever since. All her life, I have watched her as though from another shore. And now I must tell her everything about my past. It is the only way to penetrate her skin and pull her to where she can be saved.[66]

She believes that the telling of her own past, the release of her old pain, will re-establish the missing link between mother and daughter:

> I will use this sharp pain to penetrate my daughter's tough skin and cut her tiger spirit loose. She will fight me, because this is the nature of two tigers. But I will win and give her my spirit, because this is the way a mother loves her daughter.[67]

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[64] Ibid., 182.

[65] Ibid., 183-84.

[66] Ibid., 242.

[67] Ibid., 252.

Ying-Ying sees the very unfairness in the absurdly fair relationship between Lena and Harold. They split the cost of everything though actually Harold is always taking the larger share. When Ying-Ying visits them, she warns Lena of an unbalanced vase which finally does topple over:

> 'It doesn't matter,' I say, and I started to pick up the broken glass shards. 'I knew it would happen.'
> 'Then why you don't stop it?' asks my mother.
> And it's such a simple question.[68]

This is a simple exchange between mother and daughter over a simple matter, but it echoes Ying-Ying's personal experience when she was young. After seeing her future husband for the first time, she begins to know things before they happen, just like Lena claims she knows.

The mother-daughter relationship is again shown to be a link between likes, though the two parties do not necessarily see a full picture of each other. These encounters recorded in the narrative serve as the opening for them to look at each other and to see themselves through each other. For Jing-mei and her mother Suyuan, the dinner party with the other members of the Joy Luck Club is one example. Suyuan has prepared a dish of crab, and the others automatically choose the best, while Jing-mei picks a crab with a broken leg which Suyuan considers not good enough to be eaten: "I already know this. Everybody else wants best quality. You think different."[69] Jing-mei does not take the best even though she knows how to judge what is good and what is bad. Mother-daughter likeness comes through when she asks her mother why she does not use the new set of dishes bought five years ago: "Sometime (*sic*) I think something is so good, I want to save it. Then I forget I save

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[68] Ibid., 165.

[69] Ibid., 208.

it."[70] It is not the ability to judge that they lack, but the "selfishness" to take advantage of it, as the mother sees in both of them.

These incidents in the narrative where mothers witness the plight of their daughters and see not only the unhappy young women born in America, but also their past Chinese selves, are sites of understanding between mothers and daughters, and starting points for daughters to recognise a previously unknown link, both to the mother and to themselves. After Ying-Ying has commented on the grocery list on the fridge, Lena is conscious of something starting:

> And before I even do it, I know I'm starting a fight that is bigger than I know how to handle. But I do it anyway, I go to the refrigerator and I cross out "ice cream" on Harold's side of the list.[71]

The simple act of crossing out "ice cream" from her share of the bill is metaphorically Lena's act of rebellion. She has nothing to do with that ice cream, but she used to keep silent about sharing its cost because she lets her husband exploit her. As mentioned, it is not about money, but about the boundary of a self and whether this boundary is respected by people around.

From these mother-daughter exchanges the continuation between the two generations can be seen, and how the women's identity can be traced all the way back to previous generations, through the mother's lineage, and not the father's. The last events mentioned in the narrative can be seen as a summarising image of this continuity. Suyuan has never stopped trying to locate the twin daughters she left behind when fleeing Kweilin for Chungking in 1944, and a letter finally arrives three months after her death announcing that these two daughters have been found in

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[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., 164.

Shanghai. Instead of telling them that Suyuan has died, Auntie Lindo and the others concoct a letter to the twins:

> 'Dearest daughters, I too have never forgotten you in my memory or in my heart. I never gave up hope that we would see each other again in a joyous reunion. I am only sorry it has been too long. I want to tell you everything about my life since I last saw you. I want to tell you this when our family comes to see you in China ...'[72]

The contents of this fake letter are not altogether lies. Suyuan has tried so hard to locate the twins that she must have hoped for a reunion, and a wish to tell them about herself. The Joy Luck Club members therefore have written Suyuan's true feelings. On the other hand, even though Suyuan has died, someone in the family does go to meet them and tell them about Suyuan. The club members want Jing-mei to go.

After the initial request from the other members of the Club to replace her mother in the mahjong game, this second request leaves Jing-mei in the cold because this is the history of her mother before she was born. In tracing her mother's past in China Jing-mei is also engaged in a search for her origin, for mother and daughter share the same root. What was left in China was not only the twins, but the initial experience of mothering, the pain of separation and the enormous guilt complex which she subsequently brought to America and somehow transferred to Jing-mei, who always thinks of herself as not worthy of her name's sake, Jing-mei, the youngest and the most precious. Together with this heavy duty of representing her mother in meeting her twin sisters in China, there is the added difficulty of not knowing how to break the news of her death to them in the face of their years of expectation.

But identity is a strange phenomenon:

> The minute our train leaves the Hong Kong border and enters Shenzhen, China, I feel different. I can feel the skin on my forehead tingling, my blood rushing

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[72] Ibid., 269-70.

> through a new course, my bones aching with a familiar old pain. And I think, My mother was right. I am becoming Chinese.[73]

The last sentence is significant. Jing-mei enters Chinese territory and "becomes" Chinese. While in the past Jing-mei has heatedly denied her Chinese origin, the contact with things Chinese brings her immediately to the realisation that there is really something in her blood (her mother says it is genetic) which ties her to this culture. Being born in America and educated there does not change the fact that blood speaks loudly. If this is a surprise for Jing-mei, then meeting her sisters is more of a surprise:

> And then I see her. Her short hair. Her small body. And that same look on her face. She has the back of her hand pressed hard against her mouth. She is crying as though she had gone through a terrible ordeal and were happy it is over.[74]

Certainly the use of the singular pronoun "her" throughout the paragraph is deliberate. Jing-mei is supposed to meet her twin sisters, but here the person whom she has seen is deliberately described in the singular, so that it can be conflated with the image of her mother. The design is confirmed in the next paragraph, when Jing-mei recalls an incident which happened when she was five, and her mother's gesture was exactly the same as this woman she sees standing waiting for her. It is only after this parallel that she says, "[a]nd now I see her again, two of her, waving, and in one hand there is a photo, the Polaroid I sent them."[75] She is actually talking about the twin sisters and the mother at the same time.

But it is not a simple physical similarity that she sees between her mother and her sisters. For shortly afterwards, Jing-mei says, "I look at their faces again and I see

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[73] Ibid., 267.

[74] Ibid., 287.

[75] Ibid.

no trace of my mother in them. Yet they still look familiar."[76] This is a sudden shift, if we understand the previous moment of identification among them as a recognition of merely physical likeness. For here Jing-mei means something quite different. She recognises them because they have something in common, the flow of the same blood, a link through their mother. This is a simple but an important point, because the twin sisters and Jing-mei are not from the same family, basically, if the "family" is taken in its patriarchal sense. The assertion that by meeting her sisters she understands what part of her is Chinese presents her mother as the focal point which links these people from two different places and from two very different cultures. The patriarchal line of continuation is replaced by the mother-daughter lineage here.

The last image of the narrative, which can also be a summarising image of the mother-daughter lineage represented in the book, is that of the snapshot:

> The gray-green surface changes to the bright colors of our three images, sharpening and deepening all at once. And although we don't speak, I know we all see it: Together we look like our mother. Her same eyes, her same mouth, open in surprise to see, at last, her long-cherished wish.[77]

The most interesting statement is "together we look like our mother." It is not a matter of individual physical likeness to the dead woman, but the three of them together have the same eyes and the same mouth. The sameness comes from their being connected, and the fact that they feel they are connected. Who they are depends on how they are connected to other people and other places. It is only in a network of connections that Jing-mei can understand why she feels attached to people whom she has never met and to a place which she has never visited. It is all in the blood flowing in her mother and her.

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[76] Ibid., 287-88.

[77] Ibid., 288.

In many ways, *The Hundred Secret Senses* is an apt journey's end for both the characters concerned and the context of this discussion. Jade Snow in *Fifth Chinese Daughter* travels beyond her home and her father's teaching in seeking herself, Maxine in *The Woman Warrior* makes journeys to faraway soil to realise the possible heroic self in her imagination and her story-telling, Jing-mei goes to China, representing her mother to meet the twins left during the war and becomes Chinese once she enters the territory. The protagonists are all making mental and physical journeys in seeking their origin, whose recognition helps in directing them to make sense of their present.

In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, Kwan, Olivia, and Simon are making the important trip to China together, but it has special resonance for Olivia particularly. The end point of the journey is not only a place called Changmian, but it is also a rediscovered moment of nativity in the minds of the two female characters. The physical space, Changmian, is the focal point where spatial and temporal dimensions converge, where Olivia and Kwan can get in touch with their previous selves and review their lives from that specific point of orientation. And the guiding force for this physical journey to encompass a mental development simultaneously is the titled Hundred Secret Senses.

Kwan refers to these senses as a special ability to connect with people in the Yin world. According to her, the world after death is the Yin world, and the living can see and communicate with Yin people, provided that they remember how to use their secret senses. Kwan, who is responsible for bringing Olivia back to China where their relationship begins, takes up a crucial position in the narrative. She is Olivia's half sister, left in China by Jack Yee who later goes to America and marries Olivia's mother. It is only at Jack Yee's deathbed that Olivia and her mother know about

Kwan and agree to bring her to the States, according to Jack Yee's last wish. This half sister from across the ocean turns out to be the most important person to Olivia because of their common origin.

From the start Kwan has been put side by side with Olivia's biological mother. Olivia's own mother is always thinking about her own romantic relationships and neglects Olivia. Even in the narration of the story, the times when Olivia refers to her are spent in talking about how she is dealing with her own worries, not Olivia's:

> I felt myself sliding further down the ranks of favourites, getting bumped and bruised. She always had plenty of room in her life for dates with men or lunch with her so-called gal pals. With me, she was unreliable.[78]

Olivia has consciously compared her importance against that of her mother's friends, and she knows very well that her mother's love for her is not absolute, because she cannot rely on her. Kwan is reliable, however. To Olivia, Kwan is in many ways the perfect mother. She is never angry, never put off by Olivia's ploys, always ready to help, to give advice, and she obviously loves Olivia. The difference lies not so much in the blood-relationship as in the nature of the mothering provided by Kwan and Louise.

The quality of mothering is measured by the sense of security and belonging nurtured in the daughter's heart. Other mother-daughter relationships in the book may bear witness to this. Kwan, for example, has never had a good relationship with her mother, Big Ma, because she is always picking on her and finally sends her away from the house. Kwan is so shocked at the treatment she receives that she decides to lead a good life in America, return to Big Ma years later and prove to her that sending her away was a big mistake. Therefore when Kwan brings up the idea of going back to Changmian for a visit, hoping to help reconcile Olivia and Simon, she has a personal

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[78] Amy Tan, *The Hundred Secret Senses* (London: Flamingo, 1995), 7.

goal too: to have Big Ma "say she was sorry she sent [her] away,"[79] for she deserves her love. Kwan's eagerness to prove herself is a sentiment commonly found in daughters, who feel undervalued by their mothers.[80]

Kwan has never understood why Big Ma sent her away, but when she goes back, hoping to show Big Ma her mistake and release her frustration, she discovers that Big Ma has been killed in a car accident. To Big Ma's death, Kwan reacts in what Olivia considers a strange way:

> Kwan's stories of Big Ma's mistreating her always sounded to me like material for an *Auntie Dearest* memoir. Yet here is Kwan, grieving over this vile woman who literally left her with scars. Why do we love the mothers of our lives even if they were lousy caretakers? Are we born with blank hearts, waiting to be imprinted with any imitation of love?[81]

Kwan's reaction is clearly a confirmation of her love for Big Ma. Here Olivia has asked an interesting question which leads to quite a few illuminating possibilities. Daughters may love their mothers even though they are "lousy caretakers," like Kwan's Big Ma, simply because they are mother and daughter. The two women are linked to each other through the birth process and gender identity, which transcend the quality of the caring provided by the mother and the degree of love that the daughter gives in return. The mother and daughter bond cannot be fully explained and measured by reason.

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[79] Ibid., 176.

[80] Shelley Phillips has collected quite a number of mother-daughter experiences from different people to present a general view of mother-daughter psychology in a basically white, middle class, first world society. From the survey done, it is revealed that very often mother and daughter conflicts originate from a mutual love, manifested in the form of striving to prove herself worthy in the eyes of the other party in this mother-daughter relationship. Therefore the not-perfect relationship between Big Ma and Kwan may not have anything to do with inadequacies of their love for each other, instead it could very well be an intense desire to act for the good of the other. In another section of the book, the same problems and conflicts in real cases are supported and explained by some examples of theoretical or literary writings. The aim of the book is to serve as a self-help therapy guide for people who have similar problems to understand and face the situation, and hope to turn a conflict into a fruitful growth experience. Shelley Phillips, *Beyond the Myths: Mother-Daughter Relationships in Psychology, History, Literature and Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1991).

In Kwan's case, however, there is an extra dimension to the situation. Although she cannot talk face to face with a living Big Ma, she does so with Big Ma the Yin person. Kwan has three wishes before she leaves for America; with Big Ma's death, it seems impossible to fulfil her last wish, to get Big Ma say she is sorry for sending her away. But Kwan talks to the Yin person Big Ma conveys:

> She said she was wrong about the story of Young Girl's Wish. She said all my wishes had already come true. She was always sorry she sent me away. But she could never tell me this. Otherwise I wouldn't have left her for a chance at a better life.[82]

Apparently Big Ma has Kwan's ultimate good at the back of her mind. Mother and daughter are reconciled with each other across the Yin and Yang worlds. The idea of understanding between the two generations itself is already trangressive, crossing boundaries and linking gaps of time, space, status, and language. Kwan's fitful grief for her Big Ma leads Olivia to think of her own mother:

> Upon my mother's death, would I forgive her, then breathe a sigh of relief? Or would I go to an imaginary dell where my mother is now perfect, attentive and loving, where she embraces me and says, 'I'm sorry, Olivia. I was a terrible mother, really shitty. I wouldn't blame you if you never forgave me.' That's what I want to hear. I wonder what she would in fact tell me.[83]

Interestingly, there are no negative feelings towards the mother who has obviously not done her mothering duty very well. Olivia even considers the possibility of a post-mortem reconciliation between her and Louise. This inexplicable bond with her mother can actually already be seen at the beginning of the narration about her mother and her sister Kwan:

> When my teacher called Mom to say I was running a fever, it was Kwan who showed up at the nurse's office to take me home. When I fell while roller-skating, Kwan bandaged my elbows. She braided my hair. She packed lunches for Kevin,

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[81] Amy Tan, *The Hundred Secret Senses* (London: Flamingo, 1995), 190.

[82] Ibid., 188.

[83] Ibid., 190-91.

> Tommy, and me. She tried to teach me to sing Chinese nursery songs. She soothed me when I lost a tooth. She ran the washcloth over my neck while I took my bath.
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> I should have been grateful to Kwan. I could always depend on her. She liked nothing better than to be at my side. But instead, most of the time, I resented her for taking my mother's place.[84]

Kwan is a better mother than her own because she is more attentive to her needs. But instead of loving her, Olivia feels a resentment to Kwan difficult to explain. She feels that she has taken her mother's place. There is a position which can only be inhabited by one's mother, not because she deserves it, but because of who she is. The mother-daughter bond is not shaken by mere gestures of kindness and caring. Olivia's inexplicable feeling towards her own mother and Kwan is interesting in the context of our discussion. No matter how much Kwan does for Olivia, there is a place in Olivia's heart which Kwan does not occupy. It is only at the end of the novel when Olivia has learnt all about her past and realised their companionship in their previous lives, that she comes to love Kwan and see her as a part of her life. What this picture shows us is that having a common lineage will influence the way one person feels for another. Kwan's and Olivia's relationship goes back three reincarnations (whether it is knowable or possible is beside the point) and this common history makes the foundation for their bond in the present. This cross-generational bond is one of the reasons why mother and daughter have this intricate relationship with each other.

Another intriguing mother-daughter lineage in this narrative is between Du lili and Buncake. One day Buncake comes to the village and Du lili adopts her as daughter. She dotes on her daughter so much that when an accident takes Buncake's life, she cannot stand the shock and loses her mind. She begins to think of herself as Buncake, her daughter. Du lili literally gives herself up and takes on her daughter's identity. Her love breaks the boundary between the two separate persons and enables

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[84] Ibid., 10.

her to enter into her daughter's life. Once again, blood relation is shown to be less important than a mental link between two people. What Du lili has shared with Buncake is already enough to enable her to transgress beyond the boundary of life and death and bring the dead back to life, in a way. That is also the reason why China, mothering the several lives Kwan and Olivia lived with each other, comes to be the ultimate place of orientation for Olivia though she does not manage to find out the father's real name.[85]

The journey's end is achieved in all these texts by the establishment of a link between the daughter and the mother(land). Jade Snow strives to bring the set of values she has come to accept outside into the conservative Chinese family and finally gains her mother's trust in helping her with her latest birth; Maxine the story-teller reaches an understanding with her mother because she has taken up a similar role of manipulating languages. The daughters tell their stories side by side with their mothers, each reaching out for the other. We see contacts made, the ultimate one symbolised by Jing-mei's return journey to the motherland of China and establishing an instant connection with her sisters. Spoken or written, public or personal, conventional or individual, there is a common feature in all these connections between mother and daughter: an exclusively shared language. There is no specific vocabulary for this language, some may refer to it as instinct, some as a primary bond, and others would say it is simply in the blood. In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, it is the so-called "one hundred secret senses" that connect Olivia with her "mothering" figures.

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[85] This is the opposite to the no name aunt's situation in *The Woman Warrior*, here the father is the one without a name. The name he was known by has proved to be untrue, and it is impossible to find out his real name. In a way this absence of the father's real name is both important and unimportant. Unimportant because it does not appear as a crucial absence to the people concerned; important because this unimportance of the father's name further affirms the line of connection holding the mothers and daughters together. It is, in other words, a symbolic concession to the dominant importance of the mother-daughter relationship as the line of identity transferral.

Kwan talks to people in the Yin world through her hundred secret senses, and a secret sense is:

> 'How can I say? Memory, seeing, hearing, feeling, all come together, then you know something true in your heart. Like one sense, I don't know how say, maybe sense of tingle. You know this: Tingly bones mean rain coming, refreshen mind. Tingly skin on arms, something scaring you, close you up, still pop out lots a goose bump. Tingly skin top a you brain, oh-oh, now you know something true, leak into your heart, still you don't want believe it. Then you also have tingly hair in your nose. Tingly skin under your arm. Tingly spot in back of your brain - that one, you don't watch out, you got a big disaster come, mm-hm. You use your secret sense, sometimes can get message back and forth fast between two people, living, dead, doesn't matter, same sense.'[86]

Here she uses the example of a tingle to explain what a secret sense is. Basically it is a sense that every body has, but some may have forgotten the secret to understanding its meaning. The penetrating power of the secret senses distinguishes them from a more common system of communication, verbal language; and it may be put in parallel to the non-verbal link which exists between mothers and daughters. Both kinds of links stretch across physical boundaries and are intricately connected by various strands not present to the eye. The mother is a gateway to the enormous past which extends back to the infinite before, and in turn also empowers these women to face an undefined future. In the midst of this long stretch of history, the mother not only acts as the curator of information, but also serves as a point of orientation, like Kwan in her own stories. In the first life that she can remember, when she was Nunumu, a Chinese village girl, Olivia was Miss Banner the foreign lady who had been saved by her several times. In the next life Kwan mentions, Kwan became herself and Olivia joined her as Buncake the silent stranger, and after a dramatic exchange of identity, they became what they are now, Kwan and Olivia, half sisters of

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[86] Amy Tan, *The Hundred Secret Senses* (London: Flamingo, 1995), 91-92.

the same father, Jack Yee. Kwan remains close to Olivia all through these lives because she remembers how to exercise her secret senses.

Kwan left Changmian more than twenty years ago, but she is still very comfortable when she returns and is able to get back into the shape of that life and mix with the people immediately. The association with the land, the culture, particularly the stories that occur in that place keep Kwan forever close to the land no matter where she goes. Changmian is alive to her because everywhere things speak to her. She is big in the sense that she carries herself and her bond with her native Changmian wherever she goes because she already has her origin within herself, the sense of security that the past has given her helps her settle down anywhere because she always knows where she belongs. The contrast we see in Olivia and Kwan in their attitude to things is actually related to the presence or lack of the fundamental core of attachment to their past. The past and self-understanding give Kwan a sense of belonging which keeps her spirit firm and relaxed.

This security provided by the knowledge and adherence to one's past can be seen in an interesting way in the narrative. Kwan likes to tell Olivia of their past life, though Olivia never realises that she is part of the picture. Although Kwan speaks a special brand of broken English in her daily conversations, when she tells the story of their past, words flow out of her mouth in fluent and accurate English. In this passage, we see the transition she makes from saying "Libby-ah, you think this word is me, retard? Be honest,"[87] to her fluent exposition of how she leads Miss Banner into the Chinese culture in her past life:

> It's true, though. I was her teacher. When I first met her, her speech was like a baby's! Sometimes I laughed, I couldn't help it. But she did not mind. The two of us had a good time saying the wrong things all the time. We were like two actors at

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[87] Ibid., 39.

> a temple fair, using our hands, our eyebrows, the fast twist of our feet to show each other what we meant. That's how she told me about her life before she came to China.[88]

The language used in the text is very complex in its variations. Kwan speaks a mixture of English and an English translation of Chinese when she is in America. When she goes back to China, she uses her native Changmian dialect when she speaks to older people there. Then she has to translate that dialect into her English-mixture in order to make it comprehensible to Olivia. On top of everything else, she talks to those in the Yin world in her private language, sometimes English, sometimes a mixture of different dialects. This multi-lingualism illustrates the link between language and identity. Kwan is able to navigate from one mode of communication to another, especially with people and things from her past, being a versatile, sophisticated, and "inclusive" person, like a mother figure who embodies contradictions and ironies in reality. Olivia is to learn this mode of communication from Kwan, just like Miss Banner learning "to see the world almost exactly like a Chinese person"[89] from Nunumu. Kwan's ability to transnavigate among these languages is an important mothering quality for bringing Olivia to an awareness of herself.

But what is different in *The Hundred Secret Senses* from a text like *The Woman Warrior* is shown in the treatment of the body. In Maxine's imaginary recombinations of the stories heard from her mother and other sources, the body is the site where the text of life is written, ready for consultation and interpretation. The woman warrior's body is itself a weapon because the different forces exert their power on the body and they fight their battle there, finally won over by the writing of the text,

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[88] Ibid., 39-40.

[89] Ibid., 43.

the language of multifarious interpretation. The mother's body is powerful there because it is the body which is not afraid to ingest and incorporate other elements from outside. The woman warrior focuses on the possibilities of the body. *The Hundred Secret Senses* embodies a different attitude. We see bodies flaunted in the text, not for attractiveness, but for their physicality. Olivia's slim, firm body is attractive, Kwan's is big and strong, and Simon's is athletic. We have other, more unconventional bodies: Big Ma's dead body lying in the coffin, her Yin spirit asking Olivia for a photo of itself, Du lili thinking that she has entered her adopted daughter's body and become her; the young Kwan finding her surprised self encased in the body of Buncake after the flood, and Simon being obsessed with the frozen body of the dead Elsa ... There are all sorts of destructible and vulnerable bodies in *The Hundred Secret Senses*, but the shape and condition of the body seems to have nothing to do with the character's ability to understand herself.

Rather than serving as the endurable site of revelation where different forces play out their influence, the body in *The Hundred Secret Senses* is transgressible and penetrable, easily exchangeable without altering the basic essence of an identity. Nunumu becomes Kwan the skinny child, and then after the flood Kwan becomes the chubby Buncake, yet Kwan is all the time holding on to the same line of life history. She has the same memories and the same desires to share with Olivia, who has been Miss Banner and probably the chubby Buncake. What is most important about the identity of a person is not the corporeal, but memory. When Kwan mourns the death of Big Ma, Olivia says:

'At least you can still see her, I say.'[90]

'I mean as a Yin person. She can visit you.'

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[90] Ibid., 188.

> Kwan stares out the car window. 'But that's not the same. We can no longer make new memories together. We can't change the past. Not until the next lifetime.' She exhales heavily, releasing all her unsaid words.[91]

The fact that Big Ma can still be seen by her is no consolation, because what is cherished by Kwan is the ability for them to make memories together. Memory is the life-force and will be handed down to the next life, capable of being reinterpreted from the perspective of the future. But once the life of one person has ended, then the process will be resumed only when the same group of people meet again in a suitable lifetime. The text of their lives is not written on their body, but in their mind, or in their secret senses, which have replaced the corporeal bodies in being the link to one's truth.

In Kwan, the functioning of the secret senses, the access to her past life, can be distinguished from her present life through the discrepancies in the way she handles the two narratives. The story of her past, including Miss Banner, Yiban, the Captain and Lao Lo, is told in perfectly fluent English. In these memory-stories she can handle first person narration, free indirect speech and story within a story, because this is a piece of authentic history for the telling of which she does not need any effort. It is more like the text speaking through Kwan than Kwan speaking the history. But in her present life she mixes up Chinese and English and frequently makes mistakes both in grammar and in understanding. The past is well-versed and the present is improvised. When Kwan, Olivia, and Simon go back to Changmian, readers have a chance to see the original text of their life stories, Changmian the place, especially the caves where the Changmian people hide during the attack from the Tai Ping Army. The physical landscape of the place, the winds, the rain, and other natural elements all play a part in the formation of the life texts which have effects on all the villagers living there.

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[91] Ibid., 189.

Just as any other written or spoken text, Changmian as a text can be interpreted in different ways for individual purposes. The name of Changmian is already an example. Kwan explains:

> *Chang* mean 'sing,' *mian* mean 'silk,' something soft but go on forever like thread. Soft song, never ending. But some people pronounce 'Changmian' other way, rising tone change to falling, like this: *Chang*. This way *chang* mean 'long,' *mian* mean 'sleep.' Long sleep. Now you understand?[92]

The possibility of seeing Changmian as the "Doorway to World of Yin" may seem unappealing. But at a time when invaders and bandits are about everywhere this negative reputation of the place can be turned into a weapon for the Changmian people themselves. It can be seen in the manipulation of the Changmian curse. It is rumoured that whoever enters the village will not be able to come out again, and so people dare not go to the village because they think that Changmian is a village of ghosts. Olivia, hearing the stories about Changmian from Kwan, says:

> I think Changmian became a village of liars. They *let* people think they were ghosts. Less trouble than going to the caves during future wars.[93]

This certainly gives the people a lot more freedom and security from outside disturbance. When Changmian people would like to resume contact with the outside world again, they shed their ghostly status by inventing the story of an isolated ghost who lives in the cave.

All the four "personal" texts examined in this chapter are about family life, the clashes and conflicts, and also how the female members of the same family feel related to each other and seek to confirm that relationship as an important core around which the self is built. The use of first person narration reinforces this intimacy between readers and texts, which are growth stories, depicting a person's mental and

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[92] Ibid., 248.

[93] Ibid., 305.

emotional journey towards an understanding of lives in retrospection. The incidents chosen are all important moments in these people's lives: Waverly's new marriage, Lena's indecision of whether to end her marriage or not, Jing-mei's mother's recent death and the imminent reunification with her twin sisters; they are crucial in shaping the daughters' understanding of their selves, the mother's opinion and experience step in to help.

Waverly has broken away from her mother since giving up chess playing and has never been reunited with her mother, it is only when they put everything on the table that she sees the similarity between the two of them and understands what has happened in her life. This understanding enables her to have a perspective in looking at her life and her mother's life together. The same situation can be found in *The Hundred Secret Senses* when Olivia is stuck with Simon. A trip back to China is the re-establishment of a link with her "mother," the part of her which she has never realised. Once she has done that, she is in a much better position to see her desires. As for Maxine, although she does include more characters in her narrative, these characters serve to help her understand different aspects of the cultures which shape her, contributing to her knowledge of herself.

This journey into personal texts written by American-born Chinese daughters begins with Jade Snow Wong's autobiography, which presents an explicit battlefield between traditional Chinese upbringing and American cultural influence. In the next chapter, the site of encounter is shifted to the textual space of a former British colony. The different degree of Westernisation entails another way of representing women, an alternative mother-daughter bond across the land.

## Chapter Two

## Killing the Mother: Popular Women Writers in Hong Kong

So far, we have examined various ways in which mother and daughter, no matter whether physically or figuratively, are related to each other, in particular how this relationship affects the way the daughter as a maturing human being understands herself and the mechanisms influencing her character formation. Mother and daughter relationships are seen to be a guide for directing the daughter's sense of orientation and in turn giving her a stable psychological foundation to further develop her personality. In the Hong Kong texts to be examined later, the mother figure is very frequently absent, and even if present, does not seem to offer any help to the daughter at all. This gaping distance between mother and daughter may have its root in Hong Kong's history. The Opium War in 1840 and subsequently the 1842 Nanking Treaty[1] which ceded Hong Kong to Britain created a cultural gap between generations of people living in Hong Kong. British rule for one and a half century looms large over Hong Kong's Chinese background.

The mother and daughter link as represented in Hong Kong literary writing is thus structured by various forces, not infrequently contradictory to each other. For more than a century these forces have been claiming their territory without much theoretical observation either from the people of Hong Kong or from critics of other places. 1997 marked the date of a required review because reunification with

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[1] The Treaty of Nanking (1842) is the treaty signed after China's defeat in the Opium War. China had to open several ports along the coastline for the British to trade, on top of that Hong Kong Island was ceded to the British for their governing. But in the early 1980s, Margaret Thatcher, the Prime Minister of United Kingdom, brought up the topic and started a series of talks with China about the change over of Hong Kong, Kowloon Peninsula and the New Territories because it was deemed an unequal treaty that was signed by the Chinese government. The so-named 1997 problem comes from the date when the lease of the New Territories would end.

Mainland China, the motherland, came with an awareness of a gap in communication between Hong Kong city and the vast lands of her origin. From the early 1980s when the British Prime Minister Mrs. Margaret Thatcher started talks with the Mainland Chinese government, cultural products in Hong Kong began to reveal a heightened consciousness of itself as related to China. In the following we look at Xi Xi's "A Girl Like Me"[2] and *Aidao rufang*;[3] Yi Shu's *Juedui shi ge meng*[4] and *Yuyan*;[5] Zhang Xiaoxian's *Sanyue li de xingfubing*,[6] *Sange A Cup de nuren*,[7] and *Zaijian yeyoushu*;[8] and Huang Biyun's *Qizhong jimo*[9] and *Qihou*.[10] They are all literary texts produced by female writers in Hong Kong in the last thirty years, as a sample reflection of the various forms the mother-daughter link takes.

Reunion with Mainland China sparked off a myriad of critical readings of cultural products in Hong Kong. Hong Kong's literature as a branch of Mainland mainstream development, Hong Kong culture as a unique mutant from the East-West influences, Hong Kong as the oppressed nonentity desperately needing

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[2] Xi Xi, "A Girl Like Me," trans. Rachel May and Zhu Zhiyu, *A Girl Like Me and Other Stories* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong), 1986, 1-16.

[3] Xi Xi 西西, *Aidao rufang* 哀悼乳房 [Mourning for the Breast] (Taipei: Hongfan shudian, 1992).

[4] Yi Shu 亦舒, *Juedui shi ge meng* 絕對是個夢 [Definitely a Dream] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1996).

[5] Yi Shu 亦舒, *Yuyan* 預言 [Prophecy] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1991).

[6] Xiaoxian Zhang 張小嫻, *Sanyue li de xingfubing* 三月裏的幸福餅 [Fortune Cookies in March] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1997).

[7] Xiaoxian Zhang 張小嫻, *San ge A Cup de nuren* 三個 A Cup 的女人 [Three Women of Cup A] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1997).

[8] Xiaoxian Zhang 張小嫻, *Zaijian yeyoushu* 再見野鼬鼠 [Goodbye Rodent] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1996).

[9] Biyun Huang 黃碧雲, *Qizhong jimo* 七種靜默 [Seven Kinds of Silence] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1997).

[10] Biyun Huang 黃碧雲, *Qihou* 其後 [And Then] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1994).

establishment of an identity away from the dominating influence of Chinese and British cultures, and Hong Kong as the new force capitalising on the special position it inhabits in relation to China and Britain, are some major ways of understanding the position of Hong Kong culture in contemporary society. There is as yet no confirmed consensus as to what Hong Kong culture is, but the presence of different perspectives and standpoints has its merits in allowing an active exploration of a relatively new subject. Hong Kong's relationship to both Mainland China and the British culture has come into sharper focus because of the critical consideration about its literary productions.

Hong Kong's special political and historical background engenders a hybrid culture which is recognisably a mixture of original Chinese culture and British rule, but which, at the same time, is obviously different from either of the two streams of influence. The combination of the two cultural forces opens up new possibilities and styles for expression of a unique colonial and postcolonial experience. The colonial experience of Chinese encountering British power created an intensely commercial city whose development is deliberately channelled to its economy, with a relatively short literary history on record. Looking at some female writing in the years when the linkage with the motherland was an issue in social consciousness, it is not difficult to see its engagement in an attempt to negotiate a position in relation to the motherland.

Liu Denghan is one of those who regard Hong Kong as a direct descendant from China, and Hong Kong literature as a branch of the Mainland development. In his introduction to *Xianggang wenxueshi*,[11] he writes:

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[11] Denghan Liu 劉登翰, *Xianggang wenxueshi* 香港文學史 [Hong Kong Literary History] (Hong Kong: Zuojia chubanshe, 1997).

> [Hong Kong] is part of a Southern province, Guangdong, in China, is part of the framework of development of Chinese history; which also means that Hong Kong's ancient culture cannot be an independent culture, but only a wing of one of the Chinese National culture in the south - Lingnan culture.[12]

Liu is situating Hong Kong's cultural root in the larger context of Mainland China, and denying its independence. The fact that Liu sees the need to make such a claim indirectly indicates his awareness of a general feeling that Hong Kong culture is an independent entity relatively free from the core orientation of the Mainland:

> After the opium war, Hong Kong's occupation by British colonisers led to Western Cultural invasion lasting for one and a half century. If we define culture generally as culture of material, culture of system and culture of spirit, which are inter-dependent and interactive, then the British colonisers, using Western culture as their own ideological representative, through their colonial government, establishes first of all a political and legal system inherited form the West, while advocating a capitalist production relation (economic policy), finally using that political and economic privilege to spread their influence in spiritual culture, through education (like the British education system and English language teaching carried out in the numerous Anglo-Chinese schools and tertiary institutes) and other cultural facilities like organising English literature seminars, sponsoring orchestra, ballet, modern drama groups performances in Hong Kong). These are to aim at directing development of Hong Kong through Western culture. In this way, modern Hong Kong has always been under the greatest pressure of Western culture.[13]

From the last sentence, it seems that the difference between the Hong Kong one sees today and Mainland China is mainly due to the great pressure exerted by the colonial power, affecting what is by nature inherent in Hong Kong.

Once the standpoint of this critic is clear, it is not difficult to understand the way he describes the cultural situation of Hong Kong, and also the way he interprets the phenomenon:

> This is the contemporary Hong Kong. It is neither a completely westernised modern city, nor a traditional Chinese feudal town; instead it is a Chinese city where the East and West mix and juxtapose, holding their own grounds and yet interacting with each other, and a colonised city functioning as a bridge for

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[12] Ibid., 17.

[13] Ibid., 17-18.

> communication between China and the world for more than a century. The Eastern and Western cultures are distinct from each other and yet share blurred boundaries. Here is an upper society centralised around a completely westernised portion, existing side by side with a basically traditional Chinese population which has been influenced by some western ideas and cultural customs. Here one can see completely westernised lifestyle, and western life practices gradually infiltrating into Hong Kong citizens, as well as common daily life keeping very much to old Chinese traditions. This includes both ancient bad habits which have unchangingly remained deposited in the lower society, and some Chinese traditions which are more accepted by Western people now.[14]

What can be found in Hong Kong is basically a juxtaposition of both habits and practices imported by foreigners, as well as inherited traditions from Chinese culture. Even so, these customs from the West and the East do not exist in the population in the same manner. The Westernised lifestyle and practices manage to infiltrate into Hong Kong citizens, whereas the old Chinese traditions stay and are gradually accepted by the western people here. The division between a natural origin and the invader forces is still distinct in his wordings. Of course a book like *Xianggang wenxueshi*, which takes the whole of Hong Kong's literature as a subject, has certain ambitions in its commission. In fact, although in this discussion quotations are quite frequently taken from this text, it is not the only one of its kind. The fact that this book, along with other similar ones,[15] appears at this time in Hong Kong's history, already speaks a lot about the agenda behind its publication. This will be further examined in the following pages when we look at the genre of writing most

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[14] Ibid., 18.

[15] Hong Kong's literary history is not a well-developed subject, probably because of the much more distinguished development of its economy. Wang Hongzhi documents several major compilations of literary history in Hong Kong from the 50s-70s. The major historians claim to have used an apolitical approach in dealing with modern Chinese literary history, which the author thinks is actually a resistance against mainstream politics. With the 1997 unification of Hong Kong and China, an attempt to explore Hong Kong's relation to China by writing histories of this kind is in line with the political and cultural attempt of identification. For details please refer to Hongzhi Wang 王宏志, *Lishi de ouran: Cong Xianggang kan Zhongguo xiandai wenxueshi* 歷史的偶然: 從香港看中國現代文學史 [Historical Contingencies: A Study of Modern Chinese Literary Histories in Hong Kong] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1997).

prevalent in Hong Kong.

Both the geographical proximity of Hong Kong to China and its dominantly Chinese population, argue for powerful influence from Mainland writers, for on top of everything else, Chinese writing dominates Hong Kong's literary scene.[16] Therefore it is not difficult to understand why Liu is not the only one who groups Hong Kong's literary development as a branch of Chinese development.[17]

Ackbar Abbas, however, takes a different view about the orientation of Hong Kong literary writing as found in the 1990s. When he explains the features of what he calls a culture of disappearance, signifying the special cultural phenomenon in contemporary Hong Kong, he says:

> The way the city has been made to appear in many representations in fact works to make it disappear, most perniciously through the use of old binaries like East-West 'differences'.[18]

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[16] It has to be mentioned that the written language is different from the spoken language in Hong Kong. The written script is what is called "bai hua wen" 白話文, and is the kind of modern Chinese script advocated by the May Fourth scholars, as different from the older scripts. Bai hua wen is more formal and follows a different set of rules from "Guangdong hua" 廣東話 [Cantonese], which is the spoken dialect in the southern most part of China. Spoken Cantonese, when transcribed, will give very different characters from that of the written Chinese, and this split between the spoken and the written language is considered by many educationists as the biggest reason why the language proficiency of school children in Hong Kong is weakening. This fact is important especially in the Hong Kong context because from the 1960s onwards, when a more distinguished local awareness developed in the popular writing, one can see at the same time a change in the form of language used in the popular writing culture. In the 1980s when radio plays once again became a fad, the most popular plays were transcribed and published as written "pocket size" books. Some of them are highly fashionable among secondary school students, the most active group of readers. Into the 1990s this kind of directly transcribed written-Cantonese language declined in popularity, as the radio plays once again fell back into relative silence. Although the use of directly transcribed Cantonese-Chinese does not claim as big a market afterwards as when the radio-plays were popular, the written Chinese used in writings published in Hong Kong, particularly popular writing, is distinctly different from the kind of Chinese found in Mainland China.

[17] Refer to Hongzhi Wang 王宏志, *Lishi de ouran: Cong Xianggang kan Zhongguo xiandai wenxuesh* 歷史的偶然: 從香港看中國現代文學史 [Historical Contingencies: A Study of Modern Chinese Literary Histories in Hong Kong] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1997) for more detailed discussions of various approaches to Hong Kong's literary identity in relation to Mainland China.

[18] Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997), 8.

Hong Kong disappears not because it is not represented, instead with 1997 approaching, representations of Hong Kong as it was before the reunification with Mainland China proliferated because the status of Hong Kong as a colony would soon be over. The unprecedented change means one face of Hong Kong will soon be no more. Attempts to represent the city are similar to people taking snapshots when they go travelling, as proof of the presence of fleeting moments. But what Abbas is saying is that representing Hong Kong within the parameter of an East-West difference is actually making Hong Kong disappear because the cultural phenomenon of Hong Kong cannot be understood merely by seeing it as a manifestation of the East, the West, or even as a mixture of the East and the West:

> [D]isappearance is not a matter of effacement but of replacement and substitution, where the perceived danger is recontained through representations that are familiar and plausible.[19]

Representations using the East-West parameter are only a make-do framework for talking about Hong Kong because they are easy to understand, but they are inadequate in representing Hong Kong.

According to Abbas, the problems of writing Hong Kong come from the unique position Hong Kong has in relation to both its coloniser and its sovereign power. When Hong Kong is returned to the Chinese government,

> we may expect to find a situation that is quasi-colonial, but with an important historical twist: the colonized state, while politically subordinate, is in many other crucial respects *not* in a dependent subaltern position but is in fact more advanced - in terms of education, technology, access to international networks, and so forth - than the colonizing state.[20]

In certain aspects, Hong Kong the colonised state is more advanced than the colonising power, whether it is Britain or China. Therefore, Hong Kong is already

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 5-6.

passing through a phase of special postcoloniality before its decolonisation, a disturbance in the conventional understanding of chronology which plays an important role in the composition of Hong Kong's culture of disappearance. This disturbance in the sense of time and the manifestation of certain Hong Kong cultural aspects can be seen in Abbas's interpretation of the "one country, two systems" formula which is the device of the Chinese government to pacify Hong Kong people's anxiety about independence in Hong Kong. He writes:

> what we will find will not be two systems (socialist, capitalist) but one system at different stages of development - a difference in times and speeds.[21]

That is to say, what can be found operating in Hong Kong will certainly be different from the political, cultural and economic mechanisms in Mainland China, but the difference is only a matter of different maturing speed. It is a useful way to understand the difference between Hong Kong and China, particularly the uniqueness of Hong Kong culture. Time and speed have both played very important roles in the construction of representations of Hong Kong, not only in the sense of the approach of 1997 as a deadline for the end of an era and the beginning of a new one, but also in the entire retrospection of Hong Kong's colonial history. The time of the colonial past is not only the linear unfolding of a time before the present, but this means a different way of existence in itself. Before the intensification of this awareness of the 1997 deadline, cultural products made during the early 1980s, when talks between the Chinese and the British governments started, already showed a marked difference in the way they mentioned Hong Kong and its relationship to the world.[22]

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[21] Ibid., 6.

[22] Ackbar Abbas thinks that the most important cultural products in Hong Kong are those of the cinema and architecture, and not surprisingly, both of them rely quite heavily on the manipulation of

Briefly summarising, the time element in the cultural phenonmenon in Hong Kong, especially near the 1997 timeframe, links the past and the present in a unique way to one another. Without the imminence of 1997, Hong Kong does not even have a strong sense of historicity, for there is very little record of what went before British colonisation.[23] And this newly-found element of time in the representation of Hong Kong is working closely together with a particular concept of space in contemporary Hong Kong cultural products. Talking about a film produced in

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time, especially in cinema, for the mechanism of capturing an image and playing it out itself is already a manipulation of time. In his discussion of Hong Kong cinema, Abbas has paid particular attention to several local directors who have broken grounds in the representation of a Hong Kong sensibility, mainly through an interesting use of time: the past against the present, the past in the present, and the present as in the past. As the present discussion focuses on the writing medium, for details of Abbas's exploration of Hong Kong cinema, please refer to chapters two and three in his book *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997).

[23] The way it experiences time is one aspect of Hong Kong which makes it so different from other colonial cities. According to Abbas, "Hong Kong has no precolonial past to speak of. It is true that in a sense Hong Kong did have a history before 1841, when it was ceded to the British, there are records of human settlement on the island going back at least to the Sung dynasty, but the history of Hong Kong, in terms that are relevant to what it has become today, has effectively been a history of colonialism. (2)" Hong Kong as a place of inhabitation certainly exists before 1840 when the Opium War was fought between China and Britain, but there was not much record of the activities going on, probably because of the unremarkable amount of resources on the island. Even the decision of the British government to have Hong Kong as a compensation for the loss of the opium burnt by Li Zetsui was not based on its resources. What the British had in mind was in fact the large Chinese market for her products, using Hong Kong as a stepping stone, or a door to the Mainland. In Wang Gengwu's *Xianggangshi xinbian* 香港史新編 [Hong Kong History: New Perspectives], 2 vols. (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian (Hong Kong) youxian gongsi, 1997), he also notes that "history" of Hong Kong existed before the colonial period, but it is not recorded carefully. The unimportance of Hong Kong as a place for inhabitation perhaps can also be seen from Shi Shuqing's *Xianggang sanbuqu* 香港三部曲 [Hong Kong Trilogy] vol. 1, *Ta minjiao hudie* 她名叫蝴蝶 [Her Name is Butterfly] (Taibei: Hongfan shudian youxian gongsi, 1993). It is not a main text to be discussed in this chapter but the trilogy is interesting background material for the understanding of the general atmosphere of early colonial Hong Kong. In volume one, the ancestor of some of the major characters are introduced and the life habits, customary practices, and the way people thought are given a realistic representation. For the author, the desire to write the "epic" of Hong Kong comes at the end of her ten years' residence in Hong Kong. While planning the work, she discovers that in 1894 the most serious rat epidemic occurred and she used that as a way to link this trilogy to her other novels about Hong Kong. What is most interesting about her planning and finishing this trilogy of Hong Kong is perhaps the one thing which sparks off her thoughts: June Fourth of 1989. In her words, the first fire of gunshot in 1989 announced a major turning point in her personal life and writing life. She "identifies with Hong Kong where she has been in sojourn for 10 years, willingly joins every demonstration with the 6 million population in Hong Kong," and she "should write as the witness of Hong Kong history. (preface)" The association is familiar to many Hong Kong people now, the awareness of 1997, and the urge of June Fourth 1989, which together mark a threat to the understanding of an Hong Kong identity, and in turn the immediate response to this threat is to look back into the history of Hong Kong to get something to orientate the place which has slowly evolved into the Hong Kong we know today.

1984, *Yan zhi kou*,[24] which makes use of the ghost story genre to tell a story of Hong Kong, Abbas writes:

> Fifty years disappear into simultaneity while space in turn becomes heterogeneous and mixed. The result is that two periods of Hong Kong history are brought together in a historical montage. The paradox is that one of the most popular and fantastic of genres is used as a rigorous method of representing the complexities of Hong Kong's cultural space.[25]

Instead of the past slowly unfolding into the present, they are juxtaposed with each other in the same stroke, the sense of depth which usually goes with the flow of time disappears. This flattening of time also blurs one's mental image of the past and the present. The appearance of things, dress, and the mannerisms change, but apart from the surface difference, the mechanism of the representation of the past is directly related to the logic of the present-day elusiveness of Hong Kong's identity.

A third way of understanding the literary development in Hong Kong, after Liu's belief in Hong Kong as a branch of Mainland Chinese development, and Abbas's concept of a mutant disappearing culture displaced by the East West binary opposite, is what has come to be called the In-Between Theory.[26] Briefly speaking, In-Between theory is an approach to understanding Hong Kong culture as an

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[24] Yan zhi kou 胭脂扣 [Rouge], dir. Stanley Kwan 關錦鵬, perf. Leslie Cheung, Anita Mui, Facet, 1987.

[25] Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997), 41.

[26] In-Between Theory is my own translation of the Chinese term "jiafeng lun" 夾縫論, a loosely grouped perspective on looking at Hong Kong's cultural position in relation to Mainland China and Britain. Disagreement and variation exist among the critics grouped and at times this In-Between Theory also shows similarity to other schools of thought, just as it is possible to see overlapping beliefs between this group and what Abbas has written in his book. See Gaofeng Hong 孔誥烽, "Chu tan bei jin zhimin zhuyi: Cong Liang Fengyi xianxiang kan Xianggang jiafeng lun" 初探北進殖民主義：從梁鳳儀現象看香港夾縫論 [An Initial Exploration of Northern Colonisation: From Liang Fengyi to Hong Kong In-Between-ness], ed. Qingqiao Chen 陳清僑, *Wenhua xiangxiang yu yishixingtai: Dangdai Xianggang wenhua zhengzhi lunping* 文化想像與意識形態：當代香港文化政治論評 [Cultural Imagination and Ideology: Criticisms on Contemporary Hong Kong Cultural Politics] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1997), 53-88.

interaction between the British and the Mainland Chinese cultures.[27] However, the impact of this interaction on Hong Kong is different from the way Liu expresses it in his introduction to *Xianggang wenxueshi*, for he stresses the durable Chinese-ness Hong Kong inherits from China despite the cultural pressure exercised by British colonialism. In In-Between Theory, the impact of interaction between the two imperial powers on Hong Kong is a different story as told by Luo Feng:

> [Hong Kong culture] is a product belonging to neither the native Chinese nor traditional British. In fact, during the 150 years colonial history, Hong Kong has already nurtured her own unique and special cultural phenomenon through an encompassing inclusion. This culture includes both traditional Chinese cultural elements as well as nutrients and impact from the West, combining into an international cosmopolitan cultural frame.[28]

One of the differences between this In-Between Theory as in the words of Luo Feng, and Liu's idea of cultural mixing is basically in the orientation. Although Liu admits the powerful influence of British sovereignty over Hong Kong, he insists that the westernised features of this city are an intrusion from a foreign culture, underneath which one can see the Chinese city. Luo Feng, however, sees Hong Kong culture as a culture of her own, not belonging to either one or the other sovereign powers. Although in her words there is at times a falling back onto the

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[27] The different views of people loosely grouped together under the In-Between Theory brings out an interesting question about Hong Kong's position. Rey Chow and Ye Shi maintain that Hong Kong inhabits the weak position in between two very different cultures and needs to struggle for a right to speak for itself. On the other hand, Hong's reading of Liang Fengyi's work implies a strong Hong Kong position taking advantage of two different cultural associations. Whether it is a strong or weak cultural position is up to the reader, but not infrequently this kind of debate refers to Hong Kong's economic success. Hong Kong has become a centre of attention because it is one of the most successful cities economically, though it started as a small fishing village. Is this success a direct result of the infrastructure and social system laid down by the British government? We are not trying to seek the answer in this discussion, but this is to show that the effect of colonial rule has a major impact on what Hong Kong is today. The mother and the surrogate mother have both left impressions on the formation of Hong Kong's character unable to miss.

[28] Gaofeng Hong 孔誥烽, "Chu tan bei jin zhimin zhuyi: Cong Liang Fengyi xianxiang kan Xianggang jiafeng lun" 初探北進殖民主義：從梁鳳儀現象看香港夾縫論 [An Initial Exploration of Northern Colonisation: From Liang Fengyi to Hong Kong In-Between-ness], ed. Qingqiao Chen 陳清僑, *Wenhua xiangxiang yu yishixingtai: Dangdai Xianggang wenhua zhengzhi lunping* 文化想像與意識形態：當代香港文化政治論評 [Cultural Imagination and Ideology: Criticisms on

Hong Kong-China orientation,[29] generally her understanding of Hong Kong culture is as a discrete entity.

Rey Chow, and to a certain extent P. K. Leung, however, takes a lightly negative view of Hong Kong's relationship with China and Britain. Rey Chow says:

> Take the question of language for instance: What would it mean for Hong Kong to write itself in its own language? If that language is not English, it is not standard Chinese (Mandarin/Putonghua) either. It would be the "vulgar" language in practical daily use - a combination of Cantonese, broken English, and written Chinese.[30]

Hong Kong is depicted as the oppressed party caught in between two oppressive powers, Britain and China, each trying to impose a different set of practices. That explains Chow's urging of Hong Kong people to assert themselves by establishing their own set of values and systems. P. K. Leung (Ye Si) also says, "everybody seems to want to prove that Hong Kong cannot tell its own story, that Hong Kong's affairs have to be narrated by others. Everyone is fighting for the right to tell the story."[31] The everybody in Leung's theory seems to include everybody but the people who are born and living in Hong Kong, who are expected to have the right and most knowledge to tell this story of Hong Kong.

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Contemporary Hong Kong Cultural Politics] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1997), 55.

[29] In the previous footnote, there is a slight contradiction in the way she explains Hong Kong culture. While she maintains that Hong Kong as a culture does not belong to either British or Chinese cultures, in the last sentence she regards the impact of western culture as "from outside" which is a way of putting Hong Kong's allegiance back to Chinese culture, Chinese as the "inside culture" and western as the "outside input". As Hong remarks, In-Between Theory is not yet a fully developed school of thought, and there are discrepancies among writers who are considered to be in the group, as well as within the individual discourses of each critic.

[30] Rey Chow, "Between Colonizers: Hong Kong's Postcolonial Self-Writing in the 1990s," *Diaspora*, 2.2 (1992) 154-55.

[31] Ye Si 也斯 (Liang Bingjun, PK Leung), "Xianggang de gushi: weishenme zheme nan shuo?" 香港的故事: 爲什麼這麼難說? [The Hong Kong Story: Why is it So Difficult to Tell?], *Xianggang wenhua* 香港文化 [Hong Kong Culture] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Centre, 1995), 4-5.

What might make a person eligible to tell this story of Hong Kong, or what kind of story could be counted as a truly Hong Kong story? In thinking about this question, Abbas tries to distinguish between writing Hong Kong and Hong Kong writing. If Hong Kong is used as a qualifier to the subject of writing, then it

> might involve embarking on a critical survey of local authors and of texts produced in and on Hong Kong. It would be concerned with discussing a wide and representative number of works, written mainly in Cantonese, that would define a corpus and lead to the establishment of a tradition of Hong Kong literature. It might even pose questions of identity like, what is a Hong Kong writer? Or what constitutes an authentic Hong Kong text?[32]

The problem is to determine the cultural identity of Hong Kong people, which involves a process of corpus formation and generalisations about a group of people living in Hong Kong. Writing Hong Kong, however, does not put the focus on the eligibility of the producer and the products of Hong Kong, instead it is "asking how in the process of writing Hong Kong, Hong Kong as a cultural space inscribes itself in the text."[33] It is an important distinction to make in this chapter as well, for the focus here is not to draw a list of qualities to define regional literature of SAR Hong Kong, but to see writing in Hong Kong as expressing an identity in relation to the motherland.

Abbas has his own reasons for not verifying authors' valid Hong Kong identity partly because the validity of such an identity is also an indeterminable criterion. But the difference in his focus and the group of In-Between critics may not lead to mutually exclusive standpoints about the story of Hong Kong. In-Between critics stress the importance of the "self" identifying Hong Kong locals because they believe in the uniqueness of the condition of Hong Kong, and therefore the voice of

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[32] Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997), 111.

[33] Ibid.

the local should be heard. That does not mean the In-Between critics ignore representations of Hong Kong not produced by locals, rather they are urging the locals to speak in order to break through the domination by other voices. Although this politics may run the risk of reversing the cultural imperialism exerted by Britain and China, it has the value of including different versions of the Hong Kong story.[34]

The in-between-ness of Hong Kong's position is manifested in the hybrid and mutant culture of today. Hong Kong has a relatively short literary history on record, and this shortness is also related to the genres of writing most prevalent in Hong Kong, a lighter, market-oriented and fictional culture which appeals to the immediate present rather than a long tradition in the past. This weakness in the historical record of literary writing in Hong Kong is in fact one of the constituting factors of the way the city is regarded generally. In the introduction to his study of Hong Kong,[35] Abbas points out one feature which singles out Hong Kong from other ex-colonial cities: Hong Kong has no pre-colonial history to speak of. This absence of the pre-colonial past puts Hong Kong in a complex relationship with her mother culture.

Colonialism presupposes a population and a culture to be colonised. From

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[34] In his article, Hong expresses his concern over the possible outcome of letting the In-Between Theory run wild. To privilege the local culture, which is a mutated mixture of Chinese and British culture, over that of the oppressors may turn into a reverse imperialism, reversing the original binary opposition between the privileged Other and the undermined local. Hong urges for a more flexible and inclusive politics of self-understanding at the end of the article, and a breaking up of the either-or binary opposition. See Gaofeng Hong 孔誥烽, "Chu tan bei jin zhimin zhuyi: Cong Liang Fengyi xianxiang kan Xianggang jiafeng lun" 初探北進殖民主義：從梁鳳儀現象看香港夾縫論 [An Initial Exploration of Northern Colonisation: From Liang Fengyi to Hong Kong In-Between-ness], ed. Qingqiao Chen 陳清僑, *Wenhua xiangxiang yu yishixingtai: Dangdai Xianggang wenhua zhengzhi lunping* 文化想像與意識形態：當代香港文化政治論評 [Cultural Imagination and Ideology: Criticisms on Contemporary Hong Kong Cultural Politics] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1997), 85-86.

[35] Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997), 2.

both fictional and non-fictional accounts of early colonial life in Hong Kong,[36] it can be seen that the arrival of the British has meant great changes imposed on the original lifestyles of the native people.[37] The interesting feature about this pre-colonial history of Hong Kong is the dearth of studies in the one and a half centuries of colonial rule. Even in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools the history of Hong Kong seldom features.[38] In Wang Gengwu's *Xianggangshi xinbian*,[39] he has quoted a detail about Hong Kong's ancient literature:

Since the time when Chinese people lived and traded here, Hong Kong has

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[36] There are several attempts made to give a general impression of the different faces of life in Hong Kong at different periods of time. Among the fictional genre, Shi Shuqing 施叔青, *Xianggang sanbuqu* 香港三部曲 [Hong Kong Trilogy] (Taibei: Hongfan shudian youxian gongsi, 1993) is quite exhaustive. Volume one *Ta minjiao hudie* 她名叫蝴蝶 [Her Name is Butterfly] starts with the life of Huang Deyun who was kidnapped and sold to Hong Kong, to depict her life of Hong Kong alongside her personal experience. Volume two and three continue with descriptions of Huang's experiences and move through different decades of Hong Kong history, up to the 1980s at the end of volume three, when public awareness of the approaching of 1997 was already quite high. Xi Xi 西西 has also contributed to this depiction of a fictional history of Hong Kong in her novels *Wo cheng* 我城 [My City] (Hong Kong: Suye chubanshe, 1996) and *Fei zhan* 飛氈 [The Flying Carpet] (Taibei shi: Hongfan shudian youxian gongsi, 1996). The focus of these fictional representations may not give an exact picture of what life was like then, but they do contribute to a general feeling of how individuals experience the ordinary life at those times.

[37] It is generally known that Hong Kong has been a British colony. Before the British takes over the territory, however, the population on the land has already undergone other colonisations, and the first one is regarded as the one in the second century B. C., by the Han Court in China. That was when Hong Kong was included into the map of the Chinese Empire. It is an interesting idea to consider the changes this piece of land has gone through during these changes of hands. When Hong Kong was colonised by China, the act was regarded as a civilisation of "Nan Yi" 南夷 [barbarians from the South]. The colonisation in 1841 by the British and the earliest colonisation by China exhibit the same attitude from the coloniser. Both of the powers regarded Hong Kong as a land of the untamed and uncivilised, needing the education of the powers. For histories of Hong Kong extending beyond the establishment of British colonial rule, please refer to *The Hong Kong Story* by Caroline Courtauld and Mary Holdsworth, and Simon Vickers (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[38] In the Hong Kong secondary school curriculum, there are two strands of histories to study, European history which is taught in English, and Chinese history which is learned in Chinese. Chinese history includes the political and cultural history beginning from Huang Di up to the 1911 Revolution when modern republican China was established. Some textbooks may include the internal struggles between the KMT and the Communist party until 1949 the establishment of the PRC, but it is Mainland China on which they are focusing. There is very seldom mention of Hong Kong and the development of Hong Kong from being a part of China to a British colony, then unified with China in July 1997.

[39] Gengwu Wang, ed., *Xianggangshi xinbian* 香港史新編 [Hong Kong History: New Perspectives], 2 vols. (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian (Hong Kong) youxian gongsi, 1997).

> culture, including literature. In the early days, it was oral literature like ballads. The better educated residents wrote poetry, in the tradition of Tang poetry, Sung verses, Yuan songs and ancient prose. Only that these works were less noticed.[40]

The fact that the colonial government in Hong Kong did not emphasise its pre-colonial history until the approach of 1997 speaks a lot about the ideology of the colonial society.

Liu, the chief editor of *Xianggang wenxueshi*, understands the rationale for this ideology in this way:

> On the one hand, the colonial government of Hong Kong stressed a principle of 'indirect' rule over the Chinese society, relatively isolating Hong Kong from the central socio-political change of China, leaving it a marginal space as the realm of different political and cultural forces. But on the other hand, the authority of Hong Kong did not actually hope to see any social change in China, which will be favourable to the continuation and progress of colonial rule. That is the reason for its co-ordination with old culture, tradition and political force, forming an intertwining mutual support. With this dubious 'marginality', Hong Kong often becomes a forcefield for resisting political change in the Mainland, continuing the political and cultural struggles in the Mainland in other ways.[41]

For Liu, Hong Kong is deliberately kept a political void in order to act as a buffer for other influences over China, therefore the focus of Hong Kong life has always been geared to economic development, for which Hong Kong is favourably equipped. Abbas in his book calls this overemphasis on one aspect of the society "schizophrenia," seeing it as a typical feature of an extremely commercialised city which has not many other developed aspects. Rey Chow in her article[42] tries to situate Abbas's Freudian discourse and sees it, together with other similar observations about Hong Kong as a cultural and political entity, in her own reading

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[40] Ibid., 535.

[41] Denghan Liu 劉登翰, *Xianggang wenxueshi* 香港文學史 [Hong Kong Literary History] (Hong Kong: Zuojia chebanshe, 1997), 21-22.

[42] Rey Chow, "Things, Common/Places, Passages of the Port City: On Hong Kong and Hong Kong Author Leung Ping-kwan," *Differences*, 5.3 (1993) 179-204.

as manifesting a typically patriarchal way of subordinating the other as the one who lacks, coveting the missing phallus, symbol of power.

Although the texts chosen for discussion in this chapter are mainly narratives of romance[43] written by female Hong Kong writers, it is not my intention here to do a feminist reading along the strategy outlined by Rey Chow. As the narratives are categorised as popular novels, their literary merit is not as important as the speaking position constructed in the narratives. Yi Shu[44] and Zhang Xiaoxian[45] are both marketed as commercial writers, while Xi Xi[46] and Huang Biyun[47] are considered

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[43] According to Liu, the popular writing culture today is dominated by two main genres, the romantic fiction and the Chinese martial arts fiction, to which I would add, the science-cum-thriller fiction. The romantic fiction has been a major market holder since the 1960s and is still leading the sales. The martial arts fiction has been dominated by one writer, Jin Yong, since the late 1950s, and today more and more studies have been done on him and his works although there are other younger writers working in the same genre. The third category, the science fiction with its thriller element, has found its success with Ni Kuang 倪匡, with his several series of scientific thriller fiction featuring different heroes. All the three genres are still very popular today, though the market sees more sophistications now, with comic books, radio plays and movie tie-ins taking up part of the market.

[44] Yi Shu 亦舒, originally called Ni Yishu 倪亦舒, other pen names include Mui Feng, Isabelle. A popular female writer in Hong Kong, making her debut in the newspaper columns in the late 1960s. Her earliest writings are about her life as a student in Liverpool, United Kingdom. In 1970s she began to write novels, and has since published more than 180 books of novels, short stories and articles. Currently she is still writing several columns for different newspapers and magazines, under her various literary identities.

[45] Zhang Xiaoxian 張小嫻, in her thirties, is one of the most popular romance writers in the 1990s in Hong Kong. She graduated from Baptist College and had worked as an executive in local TV station. Her education background and professional status distinguish her from the previous generation of female writers, marking her a representative of locally born and produced intellectuals, a new woman who has control over her own life.

[46] Xi Xi 西西, originally called Zhang Yan 張彥, born in Shanghai in 1938, graduated from College of Education in Hong Kong. She has worked as a teacher in Hong Kong, but has changed to full time writing. Works include novels, poetry and prose collections. Her style incorporates features from European and Latin American modern literature, and she is reputed to be combining the best from traditional and modern styles. Xi Xi is best known to be depicting modern people's difficulties in life. Adapted from the blurb on the inside cover, *Xiang wo zheyang de yi ge nuzi* 像我這樣的一個女子 [A Girl Like Me] (Taibei shi: Hongfan shudian youxian gongsi, 1984).

[47] Huang Biyun 黃碧雲, born in 1961 in Hong Kong, graduated from Chinese University of Hong Kong. Then she went to Paris to study French and French culture. She has been a journalist, screen playwright, then turned a columnist for Hong Kong papers. The content of her writing is mainly about the darker side of human nature, as can be seen in the short stories discussed in this study.

more intellectual writers whose works are studied in some university courses.[48] It is therefore not as literature that they are to be appreciated, but as writing which in different ways represents and materialises the self of the writing women in a particular society like Hong Kong, as well as being in a relationship to mother China, alongside other Chinese communities in the world.

The feminisation of Hong Kong as noted by Rey Chow,[49] therefore, puts Hong Kong in a different position from other Chinese communities. Description of the following kind is not uncommon:

> Hong Kong may be more aptly compared to a less than favoured concubine. This was a secondary wife, moreover, who was received by the husband with some scepticism - as if he was rather unsure whether he had made a decent bargain. Her prospects were not fair: she has been given away by an uncaring parent casually enough, but she had not altogether extricated herself from paternal control either.[50]

Contemporary young women in Hong Kong are depicted as standing on their own because the mother figure is no longer reliable as a source of support. Material objects have taken the place of mothers as the core around which these young women identify themselves. Whereas in the American-Chinese narratives seen in the first chapter, a cultural mix within the family becomes the opportunity for mothers and daughters to exchange experiences and feelings, the cultural mix in a hybrid city like Hong Kong serves only to intensify the isolation of each group.

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[48]This way of division is not meant to be judgmental. The fact that some writers are included in the curriculum and some are not does not mean, to the writer of this dissertation, that some are better than the others. In a cultural analysis, aesthetic standard is not the most important factor to concern. These four writers who have quite different target readership and who certainly write with different aims, make justifiable comparison because they are cultural forms which have something to reveal, especially about the sense of belonging the individual writers have to their culture. Therefore talking about these different kinds of writing together does not present a problem of justification.

[49] Rey Chow, "Things, Common/Places, Passages of the Port City: On Hong Kong and Hong Kong Author Leung Ping-kwan," *Differences*, 5.3 (1993), 179-204.

[50] Caroline Courtauld and May Holdsworth with additional texts by Simon Vickers, *The Hong Kong Story* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1.

The Chinese background and Western influence find no way of communication, because the unique economic and political development in Hong Kong mutates these cultural forces into an entirely new scenario, not only pulling mothers and daughters apart, but in some cases even eliminating the need for the mother.

The literature produced by Hong Kong female writers is a useful parallel to the works of Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston. Not only do they serve as a comparison to the interaction between Chinese and Western cultural forces as seen in the American-Chinese household, they also help situate the texts of the last two chapters in this discussion. Since the high degree of individuation achieved by personae in the Hong Kong texts is attributed to the absence of the mother figure in providing orientation for the daughters, the intense struggle put up by characters in the Taiwan and Mainland Chinese texts becomes understandable in view of the presence of the mother(land).

It is useful to recall the coincidence that awareness of a local identity in Hong Kong started in the 1960s, when the economy took off with increased trade and commercial connections with foreign countries. With the improvement in international status, and the general upgrading in the standard of living, the sense of independence and the concept of an individual self gradually began to build up. Interestingly enough, this sense of independence and self-awareness seems to go hand in hand with the absence of the mother figure in the fictional texts as represented by female writers. In view of the intricate relationship Hong Kong has with the Mainland, especially beginning from the early 1980s with the issue of 1997, the representation of the mother figure may well be a reflection not only of identity at the personal level, but also on a cultural level.

Xi Xi has been writing since the late 1970s, first as a columnist then a novelist.

Her work has been reputed as having a wide range of narrative techniques.[51] "A Girl Like Me" is a story about the dismal prospects of love for a girl who works as a mortician. The story is open-ended with the young suitor walking into a coffee shop, holding a bunch of flowers as a present for the girl, and most fatefully, waiting to be taken to her workplace to have a look. At the end of the story, the narrative voice warns the readers: "in our trade, flowers is the way to say goodbye."[52] This double meaning is inherent in a lot of symbols in the text, in the nature of her job; as a mortician, she is beautifying dead bodies, while death is such an ugly truth to face; her peculiar smell of antiseptic fluid is taken as a special kind of perfume, and her pale complexion is seen as a form of personal beauty in defiance of make-up. Appearance and reality are always at odds with each other, though they seem to share some common grounds.

"A Girl Like Me" may not be representative of female identity in Hong Kong, for not many women in Hong Kong are working as morticians. But the girl's comment on her job illustrates a much more common sentiment:

> with a skill such as this, a person really wouldn't *ever* have to worry about being out of a job, and the pay is pretty good too! How could a girl like me, with little formal schooling and a limited intellect, possibly hope to compete with others in this human jungle where the weak are the prey of the strong.[53]

The girl is financially and socially independent. The job gives her a reasonably

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[51] Jieyi Chen 陳潔儀, *Yuedu Feituzhen: Lun Xi Xi de xiaoshuo xushi* 閱讀「肥土鎮」:論西西的小說敘事 [Reading Feituzhen: Comments on Xi Xi's Narrative Novels] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1998), comments on her work. "During and before the early 1980s (pre-1985), Xi Xi's novels are as a lot of scholars have commented, full of 'experimentalism' and 'exploratory,' still at the stages of experimenting, learning, or even 'practicing' in her various methods of narrativity. Though her spirit of experimentation has been well-received, it is also true that the form and technique of some works have not matured. (5)"

[52] Xi Xi, "A Girl Like Me," trans. Rachel May and Zhiyu Zhu, *A Girl Like Me and Other Stories* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1986), 17.

[53] Ibid., 5.

comfortable life, and the skills involved in the job are passed on from her aunt who has a reputation in the business. Like the texts in chapter one, the intergenerational link is used to thread different parts of a story together. The aunt, who introduces her into the profession, and from whom she inherits the reputed skills, may be regarded as a mother surrogate:

> I lost both my parents when I was a child, so I was brought up by Aunt Yifen. What has happened is that gradually, over the years, I have grown strangely like my aunt, and have even assimilated her reticence, her pale face and hands, and her slow way of walking. In every way I have grown more and more like her. Sometimes I can't help wondering who I really am - maybe I am a carbon copy; maybe the two of us are really one and the same person; maybe I am only an extension of my aunt.[54]

Aunt Yifen has been the surrogate mother in bringing up the girl, and she has also provided her with a means to support her own life financially. The fact that the girl comes to wonder whether she has become a carbon copy of Aunt Yifen can be regarded as the elder woman's success over the girl in moulding her into another version of herself.

Yet Yifen's mothering may be seen as a total failure in certain aspects. She literally makes her living out of the dead. If the mother figure is the one who gives the daughter a sense of orientation by sharing her experience and her beliefs, as in the American-Chinese families, then Aunt Yifen comes short in this. She tells stories, and she is also concretely present, but her presence and her words serve very different purposes:

> Aunt Yifen used to pour out her heart to her sleeping friends - she never wrote a diary but she 'talked' it instead; and those who were sleeping in front of her were the most wonderful listeners in the world because they could listen endlessly to every detail of her tireless talk.[55]

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[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., 9.

This is quite a macabre picture, Aunt Yifen talking happily to the cold bodies. The horror of this act comes from the distortion of the story-telling. Mothers tell stories to their children for a lot of reasons, to pass on the moral standard of that particular society, to tell of expectations, fulfilled and unfulfilled, and to shape the personality of the children. But Aunt Yifen talks to dead bodies, her story-telling is the opposite of the sustenance of life, because the listeners, no matter how attentive they are, will not be able to mature on that. This is an infertile activity.

Compared to the dead bodies, the girl seems to have even less exposure to the stories Aunt Yifen has to tell. After the incident of the young man rushing out of Yifen's workplace, she has grown more and more reticent and does not speak much even to the girl. If Aunt Yifen is taken as a surrogate mother, then she is only successful in so far as she teaches her to earn a living, but this means to support her physical life puts a heavy burden on other aspects of the girl's life. This is how the girl describes her job as a mortician:

> Over the years I had made up faces by the thousands - many of these faces looked anxious, though by far the majority looked fierce. They were my standard repertoire, and I did the appropriate mending, sewing and patching, so that they would come to look infinitely soft.[56]

It is a job of make-believe. No matter what kind of death befalls the victims, the mortician's job is to make them look natural, to erase the signs of suffering and hardship as much as possible. If the dead bodies are texts marking the pain and other experiences those dead people have gone through, then their job would be to erase history and to give a uniform appearance to all these different texts, burying their individual history.

Instead of continuing history, Aunt Yifen stops history. Her influence on the

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[56] Ibid., 8.

girl is the opposite to those of the other mother surrogates examined so far. Instead of giving her an orientation to the past so that she will have a basis to develop her future, she passes on to her a skill which is to end people's history and isolates her from the majority of the community. This mother-surrogate puts the girl in a constant state of end of history, just as she herself is isolated from the human community. A strong sense of repetition emerges when Xia enters the coffee shop holding a bunch of flowers and the first person narrator ends the story in a note of premonition. In fact, the similarity between aunt and niece has been considered as one of the reasons why Yifen passes her skills to the girl:

> It was because I was not afraid that Aunt Yifen chose me to follow in her footsteps. She had a premonition that my fate might mirror hers, though exactly why we have been becoming more and more like each other is something that neither of us could explain - perhaps to start with it was because we were neither of us afraid.[57]

Aunt Yifen's skills of beautifying corpses is in itself both a continuation and a disruption of history. A continuation because it is a perpetuation of a state of life like hers, a disruption because it is a continuous encounter with history's end.

The girl's mother in "A Girl Like Me" is different from those of the previous chapter in a significant way. Here the mother has nothing to do with the growing awareness of the narrator, though ironically the title of the story sounds like an autobiographical narrative. The mother, the daughter and the mother's sister all engage in the business of death, their family link becomes a link to death. Yet their emotional attachment to each other as members of the same family receives much less attention than their individual enthusiasm to their business of death. Family history seems to be replaced by their job whose nature is the termination of history, and death, instead of the mother, becomes the core around which the individuals find

their sense of belonging.

The absence or the death of the mother's role is found not only in "A Girl Like Me," but also in *Aidao rufang*, a novel by the same author. In the preface, the writer addresses the reader directly about the reasons for writing the book:

> About thirty months ago, on a fine summer day, after the narrator had happily swum and was having a shower in the shower room, she discovered a small lump on her breast. It was only small like a peanut, but then soon it was diagnosed as breast cancer. The story this book tells, is the loss of the breast.[58]

It is a personal story about how the narrator deals with the event, how she experiences the recovery, both physically and psychologically. The subject is completely different from "A Girl Like Me," yet there is the same concern with the role of the mother on a woman's road to realisation of herself, in this much more approachable guidebook-like narrative of a breast cancer patient.

In a section entitled "Could Be's," the narrator gives a list of possible causes for cancer, and for breast cancer in particular.

> Possible causes for breast cancer concerning internal secretions:
> Not married
> Or if married
> Never given birth
> Or if having given birth
> First baby comes after 40
> Not breast-feeding the baby
> Abortion
> Unbalanced hormonal metabolism
> Taking birth-control pills
> Or changes in menopause
> Or body shaped like an apple[59]

This selection of causes points directly to a profile of possible victims for this illness, including unfulfilled womanhood, in other words, not being a mother, or becoming a

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[57] Ibid., 11.

[58] Xi Xi, preface, *Aidao rufang* 哀悼乳房 [Mourning for the Breast] (Taipei: Hongfan shudian, 1992), i.

mother too late. The list seems to be a confirmation of woman's natural duty: to get married and bear babies when young, and breast-feed the baby, not to interfere with the path of nature by taking chemicals, and all the time submitting to the natural biological clock.

Breast cancer is represented as closely related to motherhood, even though there are other factors which might lead to this illness. Throughout the novel, there is no comment on how a woman should deal with her mothering mission, instead it is a series of reflections on contemporary life in general brought out by the narrator's encounter with the disease. A random sample of the chapter sub-headings will make it clear:

> The doctor speaks (a record of how the doctor helps to diagnose)
> Bathroom (reflections on the human body)
> Not stories (information related to breast cancer)
> Dream factory (importance of friendship and support during treatment)
> Magic bullets (the process of treatment)
> Three beatings to the Bone Monster (reflections on harmful chemicals in manufactured food)
> Body language (reflections on her relationship with her body and body language related to diseases)[60]

The narrator is making use of this personal encounter with breast cancer to talk about details in daily life which escape people's attention. Her struggle with the body puts her in closer contact with it and things which work with it. Her invaded woman's body, an unfulfilled motherhood, leads to thoughts about changing attitudes towards a woman's body in different cultures.

That is why the last section of the book may be regarded as a summary of this underlying theme of her reflections on motherhood, focusing on women's breasts through the ages in old and new cultures. The most interesting thing about this

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[59] Ibid., 30-31.

[60] Ibid., contents page.

section is not the inclusion of pictures about various maternal gods, but the suggestive arrangement of having the Egyptian pyramids leading the pictorial series, and ending with the glass pyramid built in front of the Louvre by I. M. Pei.[61] With the Egyptian pyramids, the narrator writes:

> In Egypt, these houses of mother's milk stand firmly in the boundless desert, representing the deepest impression of the early stage in human civilisation. This is also the human praise for the mother.[62]

The shape of the pyramids is compared to a woman's breast, the firmness with which the pyramids stand in human civilisation signifies the everlasting power of the mother's life-giving capacity. It is a reference to the supposedly oldest mission of woman, the life-giving and life-sustaining Mother Nature. But then towards the end of the series, the pyramid has changed in time, place, as well as appearance:

> Women today wish their breasts to look pretty, just like the glass pyramids in front of the Louvre. From Giza desert's three big pyramids, to the one pyramid in front of a French palace, is there also a reflection of the changes involved in this house of human milk? The former are packed and thick, fitting with nature in time and space; the latter is light, transparent, open, tempting, the internal space a witness to passing time. Mournful breasts, our life force is shrinking so obviously today.[63]

The difference in the texture, appearance, and density of these glass breasts signifies to the writer a difference in people's attitude towards women's breasts. The practical function to nurture has given way to a more aesthetic purpose which in a way also means detachment from nature. The last sentence, mourning for the loss

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[61] I. M. Pei 貝聿銘, born in Guangdong, China, in 1917. Studied in MIT and Harvard Graduate School of Design, and became a naturalised citizen of the United States in 1954. He began his practice as architect for real estate developments, and demonstrated that buildings of real distinction can be done in this association. Later he developed new skills in concrete sculpturing and was internationally recognised. Very much sought after, he has projects all over the world, including South East Asia and Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, the best known buildings he has done are the Sunning Plaza and the Bank of China Tower.

[62] Xi Xi, preface, *Aidao rufang* 哀悼乳房 [Mourning for the Breast] (Taipei: Hongfan shudian, 1992), 318.

[63] Ibid., 332.

of the life force, may be seen as an echo to the title of the book, as well as an underlying theme of the narrative. The pyramid form, uprooted from its original birthplace and implanted on a foreign land, is already cut off from the source of its life, losing the maternal quality of nurturing the next generation. This cutting off, this existing in a foreign land, preserving something of the original source culture but with a hidden mutation, is not unlike the Hong Kong culture described by Abbas. Disappearance does not only mean not appearing, but also not appearing in the same way.

The gradual and culturally constructed disappearance of the function of the breast may serve as a metaphor for the present discussion of female Hong Kong writers. The actual amputation of the narrator's breast is juxtaposed with the symbolic amputation of its natural function in Western culture, as seen in the photo-section of the novel, and this disappearance leads one to think of the figure of the mother, both physically and symbolically. The girl in "A Girl Like Me" does not have a mother figure to give her the sense of orientation and belonging which is important as a starting point of self understanding; and the narrator here mourns for the death of a mother's natural role.

Yi Shu targets a different group of readers, and the subjects of her stories appear to be more immediately appealing. Like many other writers in Hong Kong, she started with writing columns in newspapers, and has since manipulated a different cultural space in constructing and reinforcing her writer's identity. Columns, a special literary space located on the threshold between a public and a private realm, has flowered in Hong Kong. In his two-volume *Xianggangshi xinbian*, Wang Gengwu talks about its value:

> There have always been debates as to whether column writing is literature. If we say 'using words to express feelings and thoughts' is literature, then these

> columns are all literature; if we think that a reasonable artistry (figures of speech) should be present during the process of expression, then some columns are weak, or even not, literature. But, whatever the case may be, column writing in Hong Kong involves the most authors, readers, and biggest social influences, and therefore the most important genre in Hong Kong literature.
> ... Hong Kong possesses a lot of 'world's most' ... I think we can add the eighth most: having the most number of columns and column writers in the world.[64]

Aesthetic value aside, Wang calls it the "most important genre in Hong Kong literature" because of its extent of influence.

The significance of the column in relation to the literary scene in Hong Kong can be surmised by the fact that many of the writers publishing today make their debut in writing columns, and many of them keep on writing columns even after becoming bestseller writers.[65] The nature of columns embodies some of the most important qualities of writing in Hong Kong, as explained by Wang:

> Hong Kong is a busy industrial and commercial city, life moves very quickly, and short precise pieces are most welcome by readers. Different columns cater for a 'variety' of tastes, and their handling emphasises 'speed'; this is a 'good' thing for the press because it 'saves' a lot of editing time, which in turn saves a lot of expenses, being very cost effective - typical of industrial and commercial societies.[66]

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[64] Gengwu Wang 王賡武 ed., *Xianggangshi xinbian*, 香港史新編 [Hong Kong History: New Perspectives], 2 vols. (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian (Hong Kong) youxian gongsi, 1997), 553.

[65] The list of writers beginning their writing career as columnists include Nong Fu 農婦 [The Farm Wife], Lin Yanni 林燕妮, Yi Shu 亦舒, Zhang Xiaoxian 張小嫻, Yi Da 依達, Cen Kailun 岑凱倫, Qiong Yao 瓊瑤, Zhong Lingling 鍾玲玲, Ni Kuang 倪匡, Xi Xi 西西, Liang Fengyi 梁鳳儀, and the list can be longer. The flexibility of columns certainly allows writers of different kinds to have their work published, be it fiction or just personal observations and opinions. Even after writers have gained a name and moved on to publishing paperbacks, they keep on writing their columns firstly because the newspapers like to have them there as attraction; and secondly because these writers can make use of the column to maintain the reader's interest in the writer as a person, as opposed to just a voice on paper. Zhang Xiaoxian, one of the writers whose work will be discussed later, is one who operates columns side by side with her paperback publications. For details about how it is done, please refer to Chen Jialing 陳嘉玲, "Yi ge aiqing xiaoshuojia de chansheng: Zhang Xiaoxian de wenhua jiazhi" 一個愛情流行小說家的產生: 張小嫻的文化價值 [The Birth of a Popular Romance Writer: Cultural Value of Zhang Xiaoxian], in Chen Qingqiao 陳清僑 ed., *Wenhua xiangxiang yu yishixingtai: Dangdai Xianggang wenhua zhengzhi lunping* 文化想像與意識形態: 當代香港文化政治論評 [Cultural Imagination and Ideology: Criticisms on Contemporary Hong Kong Cultural Politics] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1997), 217-27. Another example is Yi Shu, who has been enormously prolific, yet keeping columns in several newspapers.

[66] Gengwu Wang 王賡武 ed., *Xianggangshi xinbian* 香港史新編 [Hong Kong History: New Perspectives], 2 vols. (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (Hong Kong) Ltd., 1997), 563.

Popular culture is closely related to the requirements in a society, and in as busy a city as Hong Kong, the reading material which sells best is the pocket size fiction or collected prose, which do not take a lot of time to understand and to digest. If one sees, as Wang does, column writing as the most typical kind of literary writing in Hong Kong, then it is easy to understand the particular qualities exhibited in the writing examined in this chapter, and why it appeals to the general readership in Hong Kong.

Yi Shu's novels contain elements similar to those found in newspaper columns. As can be seen with a general survey of her works,[67] her stories feature the same stereotypical characters, heavily loaded with an identifiable value system, moving in a cosmopolitan Hong Kong. The consistent urban atmosphere in her novels, as well as her character stereotypes highlight a specific theme which reconstructs the scenario of a Hong Kong story - the death of the mother.

There are mother characters in her large collection of books, but they do not play any role in their daughter's growth. Cheng Zhen is a journalist with a reputation in the fictional society of Hong Kong in *Juedui shi ge meng*. She is married and has an adopted daughter Cheng Gong, whom she feels is not properly cared for by her own mother, an old school friend of hers. The biological mother is shown to be incapable of providing care for her daughter, either because she does not have the financial means or the maturity herself to become a good mother. Cheng Zhen,

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[67] Yi Shu has created a vast collection of characters, but they usually fall into one or the other of her usual repertoire: the highly protected innocent and self-satisfied woman, the capable and knowing career woman who takes responsibilities for herself and very often the others, the sphinx-like woman who selfishly makes use of the others to advance herself. Characters may go through different stages of their lives taking up different roles, thus complicating their personality and experience, but in general the stereotypes do not prepare for a lot of subtleties in individual characters. In this discussion, an in-depth analysis of Yi Shu's characters will be avoided because of firstly the rather repetitive nature of her writing, and secondly the focus of the discussion is on a larger picture than this individual writer.

however, is represented as good for Cheng Gong not because she is a better choice as a mother, but because she sees herself as a friend. Time and again the nearly perfect relationship between the two is attributed to their compatibility as friends.

In contrast, Cheng Zhen's relationship with her own biological mother is described in a much more causal manner:

> A month after quitting, she is so bored that her bones ache. Her mother voices her complaints to Cheng Zhen every afternoon, covering her own misfortunes from when she was twenty and had to suffer the tantrums of her in-laws, up to the present when her children are unfilial. Cheng Zhen is sick of it.[68]

This is no comparison to the way Cheng Zhen relates to Cheng Gong, who has no blood relations with her. The physical bond between the biological mother and daughter is shown as no advantage at all. Not only does one find a casualness in the biological mother-daughter relationship, but there is almost a deliberate downplaying of the importance of such a link over the development of the daughter's personality. The one who has the most long-lasting influence on the daughter is never the biological mother, it may be older women or total strangers from the previous generation, but not the narrator's own mother.[69]

The absence of the mother as a guiding force or role model for the daughter in Yi Shu's books, and in fact in most of the narratives examined in this chapter, must be distinguished from the kind of absence when a substitute is sought to fill the

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[68] Yi Shu 亦舒, *Juedui shi ge meng* 絕對是個夢 [Definitely a Dream] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1996), 3.

[69] Examples of such influence exerted by older, and usually legendary women over a younger narrator can be found easily in her novels. In *Xiang xue hai* 香雪海 [The Mysterious Lady] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1983), it was the mysterious character of the title, the sick lady who has a particular attraction towards the young female narrator, in *Shiliu tu* 石榴圖 [The Paintings] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1988) it was the old aunt and the mysterious lady protagonist of the island called Illusion which capture the attention of the narrator and change her life. *You guoqu de nuren* 有過去的女人 [A Woman with a Past] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1988), *Jiaming yu Meigui* 家明與玫瑰 [Ka Ming and Rose] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1980) also share this feature of a direct strong impact from an older woman who has no relation with the narrator at all.

position. The lack in Yi Shu's fiction is even more profound, for it is the need for the mother that is absent, as if the concept of the mother as a guiding force is non-existent. Both biological and substitute mothers are portrayed in varying degrees of detail in her novels, but their help as a pointer to the daughter's sense of orientation is never sought.

Certainly an in-depth mother-daughter relationship may not be the first priority of the writer, especially when the majority of her readers would be young working women who look for entertainment, romance, and perhaps fashionable opinions in her novels.[70] Yet the obvious appeal these books have for a major group of readers does reveal a link between the content of these stories and the reader's daily life. After all, Hong Kong has a large population of working women who are reasonably independent financially, because they are better educated on average than previous generations, and as a result the tie with the family is loosened. With mothers going out to work, daughters do not relate to mothers in the same manner as when mothers were always at home waiting for the children to return from school.

Therefore the fictional world where mothers are alive but playing a minimum role in the daughter's life will not come as a surprise to readers. Even a mother as famous as Cen Renzhi in *Yuyan*[71] is not much help to her daughter in terms of her

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[70] This is not a unique phenomenon in the popular writing in Hong Kong. The writer's opinion in many cases may be upheld as an unconventional or knowledged opinion especially when the writer has cultivated a particular image for himself or herself. For Yi Shu, she started writing as an educated young woman, quick-witted, having traditional views on gender relationship but unconventional ideas on all other things. She has portrayed herself as a literary person well-read in both English and Chinese, as shown in her *Liu Ying xuesheng rizhi* 留英學生日誌 [Journal of an Overseas Student in the United Kingdom] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1989). She also assumes good taste in many aspects of life, for example, in clothing and appearance. Her narrators' voices are made to be felt throughout her novels, loaded with the same value system and making value judgments on other characters and situations accordingly. Some of the readers may be looking for value judgement of this kind when they read her novels, because of the process of identification, they would like to aspire to a status where their opinions are also valued by the others.

[71] Yi Shu 亦舒, *Yuyan* 預言 [Prophecy] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1991).

growth to individuation. She still has to depend on herself, thus her motto: "there is no one to depend on but oneself." In fact, one of the consistent themes throughout her novels and other writings is the need for women's independence, both financially and intellectually, because it is a matter of self-respect and dignity. This focus on the personal independence of women today comes hand in hand with the phasing out of the importance of the mother figure, as well as the male partner. The mother and the husband, who used to be the two biggest corner stones of a woman's life, are phased out in the novels because the female today has only herself to rely on.

What can be seen in Yi Shu's popular writing can be expressed as a lone self not too dissimilar from what is found in Xi Xi's work. Xi Xi's heroines are alone because something about the role of the mother has changed, and Yi Shu's heroines are alone because the mothers are no longer required to play the role of a nurturer. Liu, when introducing Yi Shu in his *Xianggang wenxueshi*, writes:

> The city, city women, the bourgeois lifestyle of city women, form the basic elements of Yi Shu's novels.[72]
>
> The ending of her stories are usually unhappy, this is a special feature in her works: real life, no dreams, but tears; no fantasy, but is still romantic.[73]

This sense of solitude is also a result of the urban environment of Hong Kong, as city life is represented as a race putting pressure on the individual's time, emotions and thinking space, so much so that people do not connect with each other anymore. Cheng Zhen describes her job as "a very demanding job. From early morning to late at night, running about, once relaxed, no one wants to pick up the equipment and

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[72] Denghan Liu 劉登翰, *Xianggang wenxueshi* 香港文學史 [Hong Kong Literary History] (Hong Kong: Zuojia chubanshe, 1997), 388.

[73] Ibid., 387.

dash about again."[74] The need to remain competitive puts pressure on human connection. Once the connection breaks down, the individuals become even more isolated, and have to be more self-dependent by necessity.

Yi Shu is not the only writer to talk about urban life in Hong Kong, as can be expected, but the way urban environment is described by Yi Shu has a special flavour true to a specific quality in Hong Kong culture. It is in her language. In an episode Cheng Zhen is discussing with her former boss, Liu Qun, her decision to emigrate in *Juedui shi ge meng*:[75]

> Liu Qun said with sympathy, 'Cheng Zhen, people like you should stay [in Hong Kong].'
> Cheng Zhen was nonchalant, wiping her face with a dash of her hand, 'Dong Xin has issued the final ultimatum,[76] it will be divorce if I don't go with him.'
> Liu sneered, 'Divorce then.'
> Cheng giggled.
> 'Why did you marry him in the first place?'
> Cheng leaned forward, 'The truth or the lie?'
> 'What about the truth?'
> 'I never knew I would make my name, otherwise I would not have got married.'
> 'The lie?'
> 'Everyone needs a home, time is eternal,[77] at least there is someone to count the days together. Even the most glamorous ball will end, there is no missing of good times.[78]

Cheng Zhen is a successful journalist who has already made a name for herself. One can see from the vocabulary that she is very much at ease with language, using Chinese idioms in an English structure. The two language systems are appropriated, mutated into a new way of speaking, a most colloquial Chinese

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[74] Yi Shu 亦舒, *Juedui shi ge meng* 絕對是個夢 [Definitely a Dream] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1996), 164.

[75] Ibid., 9.

[76] In Yi Shu's Chinese original, she has used the term "哀的美敦," which does not mean anything in a Chinese context because it is a transliteration of "ultimatum."

[77] The Chinese expression is "tian chang di jiu" 天長地久.

[78] The Chinese expression is "lian lian hong chen" 戀戀紅塵.

language, though in written form, but much closer to the spoken Cantonese.

This mutant language style is not only a quality of this author, but is also a reflection of the literary and cultural forces at work in Hong Kong. A new force is born out of the interaction between the English language and Chinese culture, giving birth to something neither one nor the other, but containing traces of both parents. Yi Shu's narrator emphasises the justification of using the two languages well. In *Liu Ying xuesheng rizhi*,[79] she writes:

> Of course my English is up to standard, the standard of my English literature is also first rate. From Shakespeare to Dylan Thomas, Dickens to Joyce, Yeats to e. e. Cummings, Jane Austen to Agatha Christie - it is my duty to be even better. What else do I know? Apart from Chinese, I only know English.[80]

With two major cultures exercising their influence on the social and cultural background of Hong Kong, competence in these two languages is not considered an achievement.

Awareness of the double cultural pull is evident not only in her views of language competence, but also in the type of stories she writes. From 1982 onwards, Hong Kong people began to be reminded of the possibility of a reunification with China, when Margaret Thatcher started negotiations with the Chinese government, and this awareness is reflected in Yi Shu's works from the early nineties, when the reunification was to be a reality. Abbas coins Walter Benjamin's "love at last sight" to describe the sudden upsurge of studies concerning Hong Kong in the decade before unification.[81]

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[79] Yi Shu 亦舒, *Liu Ying xuesheng rizhi* 留英學生日誌 [Journal of an Overseas Student in the United Kingdom] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1989).

[80]Ibid., 183.

[81] A look at the publications with Hong Kong as the subject for study will show the sudden increase of attention to this place which was going to experience a change in status. The following is a sample list of general cultural-historical studies of Hong Kong. *Old Photographs of Hong Kong* by

The information contained in these publications is just like the pre-colonial history of Hong Kong, it has always been present, but is never focused upon enough to be the subject of a book. The demand for this kind of explorations of Hong Kong's past, place names and customs, reveals people's sharpened awareness concerning their birth place and also their own cultural background. Apart from information about local history, reference books on literary writing and cultural phenomena in Hong Kong also appear steadily, beginning with academic publications. This is an important stage in the understanding of Hong Kong as a cultural unit especially because of the time factor. On the brink of everything from

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David Cuppleditch (Hong Kong: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1997). *From Village to City: Studies in the Traditional Roots of Hong Kong Society*, edited by David Faure, James Hayes and Alan Birch (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1984). *An Illustrated History of Hong Kong* by Nigel Cameron (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1991). *Hong Kong: The Colony That Never Was* by Alan Birch (Hong Kong: Odessy, 1991). *Hong Kong Through Postcards 1940s-1970s*, edited by Cheun Po Hung, compiled by Alan S K Cheung, David P M Toong and Billy L M Chan (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (Hong Kong) Ltd., 1997). *The Hong Kong Collection: Memorabilia of a Colonial Era* by Nigel Cameron and Dr. Patrick Hase (Hong Kong: Form Asia, 1997). *In Search of the Past: A Guide To The Antiquities Of Hong Kong* by Solomon Bard (Hong Kong: The Urban Council, 1988). *Goodbye, Gweilo: Public Opinion and the 1997 Problem in Hong Kong* by L Erwin Atwood and Ann Marie Major (New Jersey: Hampton Press, Inc., 1996). *History of Hong Kong 1842-1984*, edited by David Faure (Hong Kong: Tamarind Books, 1995). *Government and Politics: A Documentary History of Hong Kong* edited by Steven Tsang (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1995). *Lectures on Hong Kong History: Hong Kong's Role in Modern Chinese History* by K C Fok (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 1990). *Hong Kong: Chronique d'une île sous influence* by Gérard A Jaeger (Paris: Editions du Félin, 1997). Dehua Zheng 鄭德華, Yan Zi炎子, *Suiyueliuqing: Manhua Xianggang shi* 歲月留情：漫畫香港史 [Sentimental Pictures: Animated History of Hong Kong] (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian (Hong Kong) youxian gongsi, 1992). Zhihua Chen 陳志華, Jialiang Huang 黃家樑, *Jian ming Xianggang lishi* 簡明香港歷史 [Simplified Hong Kong History] (Hong Kong: Mingbao chubanshe youxian gongsi, 1998). Qian Chen 陳謙, *Xianggang jiu shi jianwenlu* 香港舊事見聞錄 [Notes on Old Hong Kong Matters] (Guangdong: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1989). Zhanyi Chen 陳湛頤, *Ribenren yu Xianggang: Shi jiu shiji jianwenlu* 日本人與香港：十九世紀見聞錄 [The Japanese and Hong Kong: Notes on Nineteenth Century Adventures] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong jiaoyu tushu gongsi, 1995). Bingzheng Jiang 姜秉正, *Xianggang wenti shimo* 香港問題始末 [Explaining the Hong Kong Problem] (Shaanxi: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1987). Yingtai Dou 竇應泰, *Xianggang mimi dangan* 香港秘密檔案 [The Secret File of Hong Kong] (Harbin: Beifang wenyi chubanshe, 1997). Qichang Huo 霍啓昌, *Xianggang shi jiaoxue cankao ziliao* 香港史教學參考資料 [History of Hong Kong Reference for Teaching] (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian (Hong Kong) youxian gongsi, 1995). Apart from general studies of how Hong Kong becomes an international commercial and financial city as it is today, there are also a number of local studies, about specific historical locations of Hong Kong, folk story associated to the origins of these locations and old customs, such as zhang gu 掌故. This genre is a particularly interesting one because local interest has never been great enough to support a series of publications like this. The interest of local people in the place they have been living probably for most of their lives come together with the knowledge that the place is going to be different soon.

the past being lost, studies about the past increase in number to make sense of its history before moving to the next stage. Yi Shu does it the other way round by writing a series of urban romances in a future society easily identifiable as Hong Kong. Telling stories about a future Hong Kong may serve as a way to project her expectations about this society under another system.

*Yuyan* is such a story. The beginning states very clearly the time and place: "2004. A cosmopolis."[82] Although the time is in the future, the focus is not on the advancement of technology and how it affects the citizens' lives, but on the impact of a different political system. It is important to mention this both because of Yi Shu's identity and the situation of the popular writing market in Hong Kong. Yi Shu's brother is also a famous writer,[83] of science fiction, therefore Yi Shu always has that tendency to incorporate scientific elements into her urban romance. What is striking is that the background does not interfere with the behaviour and values of her repertoire of characters.[84]

*Yuyan* is particularly interesting as an anticipation of future life under the rule of an imaginary Chinese government. The choice of characters is already

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[82] Yi Shu 亦舒, *Yuyan* 預言 [Prophecy] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1991), 1.

[83] Yi Shu's brother is Ni Kuang 倪匡, a famous writer and talk-show host. His earliest writings are science fictions, forming a series with two major characters as the lead. Later he started other series, branching into spy, thriller and even soft pornography, but still with adventures as the linking theme. His fictions are serialised in newspaper columns, later published by Ming Chuang Publishing Ltd., then Po Yi, all of which are major popular writing publishing houses in Hong Kong.

[84] *Ta ren de meng* 他人的夢 [Other People's Dreams] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1992), *Lanse doushi* 藍色都市 [Blue City] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1994), are novels using the cosmopolitan setting, featuring hi-tech facilities and advanced concepts of science, but the interaction between the hi-tech environment and the characters' daily life is minimal. The environment is merely another site for the emotions of the protagonists to be played out and for the invisible narrator to voice her comments on inter-sexual relationships. These novels are all written in the 1990s. Since Yi Shu has always been Ni's sister, to say that it is merely his influence that she uses this as background is not enough. It is therefore not unreasonable to surmise that the end of the century, moreover the generally heightened awareness of the end of British rule over Hong Kong, has manifested itself in the choice of the background and the characters' responses to it.

suggestive: Chen Esheng, an emigrant since the age of twelve, back to the city for a visit to see how things are working out under Chinese rule; Liu Dawei, a special agent for the Chinese government, whose duty is to watch over the possibly "anti-revolutionary" actions of Chen; and Chen's fiance, Guan Shichang, who is really working for Japanese agents to get classified information. The readers follow Chen, who tries to confirm her adolescent memory of an older Hong Kong, and are inevitably disappointed. The description of this new Hong Kong is important not so much as a realistic model of a future city, but as a projection of what someone in Yi Shu's position expects to see after the handover. The first thing Liu, pretending to be a taxi-driver to get close to Chen, says to her is, "How is it? Better than under the British?"[85]

The significance of this sentence lies in the foci of comparison. It is natural for people to compare the city under two different regimes, the meaning of the comparison, however, lies in the things being compared. Liu, as a Chinese agent, looks at the surface discipline, the constructions and the engineering projects of the new city and deems the city improving. What Chen is looking at, however, are things like Victoria Park, the huge variety of newspapers and magazines once present in Hong Kong, the traditional Hong Kong breakfast of Chinese pancakes and so forth, all unimportant in terms of political value, but closely related to the real life of real Hong Kong people. The question coming from this montage of two different frames of comparison is the issue of perspective. Good or bad, progression or regression, depends on what one looks at.

The central event of the novel, at least from the new government's point of view, is the homecoming of Chen's mother, Cen Renzhi, who was a famous writer

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[85] Yi Shu 亦舒, *Yuyan* 預言 [Prophecy] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1991), 2.

before the handover, but had emigrated and refused to reestablish a link with her home city ever since. It is an important event also in terms of the symbolic meaning of the novel. Hong Kong has returned to her motherland, but Cen Renzhi, the talented daughter, has refused to do the same despite the many invitations for talks and prizes from the motherland. Her emigration to Canada is an act of a denial of her motherland, even when her biological mother died in Hong Kong, she still refused to return. This double refusal marks her individuality and to some, eccentricity and ingratitude, for what the motherland offers is honour, glory and concrete support to further her writing career.

The result of Cen's refusal to reunite with her motherland is the disappearance of her books in the new Hong Kong. Once she comes back to repair the disaster caused by her daughter and Guan Shichang, her books appear in new editions again. Her relationship with the motherland has changed from one of mutual denial to one of mutual benefits. Reading this as a metaphor on Hong Kong, the relationship between this small city and her mother can also be read as one of mutual interest. It is a long way from Liu's view of Hong Kong culture as a branch of Mainland Chinese development, for here the question of tradition, origin, and heritage does not enter into the picture at all. What is represented is a link between the mother and the daughter through human intervention, not excluding coercion and threat.

At the end of Cen Renzhi's trip to Hong Kong, Chen marvels at her mother's stamina and tolerance amid the trouble and fuss the government has made over her homecoming. She describes her mother's participation as an excellent performance while her mother comments that the quality of the propaganda is excellent, particularly the huge photos they take of her. Consequent to this show, she is reestablished as an important writer again in the motherland; but for Cen herself, the

moment the plane takes off, she falls asleep out of relief. The superficial link between the mother and the daughter is re-established, and looks promising, but it has changed fundamentally in nature and is denied once again by the daughter immediately when her side of the bargain is cashed.

Adopting Abbas's words, the mothers in the narratives discussed have both appeared and disappeared. The biological mother and adopted mothers are present in person, living together with the daughter, but the link between the mother and the daughter, which is seen as a major pull in stabilising the daughter's sense of belonging to a place, has disappeared so completely that the lack is not even mentioned, and no attempt has been made to replace this void by other figures. What has survived from the original mother-daughter link is transformed into another kind of mutual influence, one which concerns the material survival of the daughter, but does not help in her psychological development at all. Maybe it is this transformation of the original mother-daughter relationship which renders the female writing looked at so far "motherless," the generation to generation bond vanishes to be replaced by something different.

The novels of Zhang Xiaoxian discussed here will be an illustration of this replacement of the vertical mother and daughter link by something different. This alternative women-women bond has taken up the function of what a mother-daughter relationship has served in the previous chapter. But before tracing the formation of this alternative bond between women, it will be useful to see how Zhang Xiaoxian markets herself, for the image of herself, and subsequently of her narrator, her narrator's peer groups, are all elements of this new women-women bond. The following is a blurb on the cover of her book introducing herself:

> Zhang Xiaoxian, from Guangdong Kaiping, graduated from the Department of Communication, Hong Kong Baptist College. Born in Hong Kong, her mind

> matures much faster than her body. When still a student, she liked to fight for justice, but soon she learnt the lesson, and hid away to write. She has been TV script writer and executive, and has written film scripts. Unfortunately she was too credulous and often cheated of her fees. Emotionally much wiser and it is the other party who always is cheated. Dreaming of retiring or getting married in the 1990s, but it seems chances are remote.[86]

As Chen Jialing mentions,[87] the type of information given on the blurb is the result of calculation regarding the reader's reception. Zhang is constructed as an educated new woman, who may be credulous in other aspects but definitely a shrewd character where romantic relationships are concerned. The details about maturity further reinforce her strength as a brain and not a body, and this image is important to the overall effects of her writing. The difference between the mind and the body is in the connotation given to the quality of the individual. In saying that Zhang projects a mind-image of herself rather than a body-image, what is enforced are certain qualities she has chosen for her public image. This public image has a significant role to play both in the identity of this writer and in the narrator's voice in her novels.

Except for her first novel *Mianbaoshu shang de nuren*, all her later novels bear a photo of the author on the inside cover. The black and white photo presents Zhang as having long straight hair, in a white blouse, dark vest, and trousers. In *Huangguan zazhi*[88] where Zhang has a column of several pages long, photos

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[86] Xiaoxian Zhang 張小嫻, blurb from the cover of *Mianbaoshu shang de nuren* 麵包樹上的女人 [Woman on the Bread Tree] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1997).

[87] Jialing Chen 陳嘉玲, "Yi ge aiqing liuxing xiaoshuojia de chansgeng: Zhang Xiaoxian de wenhua jiazhi" 一個愛情流行小說家的產生：張小嫻的文化價值 [The Birth of a Popular Romance Writer: Cultural Value of Zhang Xiaoxian], Qingqiao Chen 陳清僑 ed, *Wenhua xiangxiang yu yishixingtai: Dangdai Xianggang wenhua zhengshi lunping* 文化想像與意識形態：當代香港文化政治論評 (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1997), 217-27.

[88] *Huangguan zazhi* 皇冠雜誌 [Crown Magazine] is a literary-cum-entertainment magazine similar to *Reader's Digest*. Published by the big Taiwanese Publishing House, Crown Publication, it comes out every month featuring major writers in Taiwan, as well as reports of literary and cultural activities in Chinese communities over the world, but mostly in Taiwan. It is also one of the major

accompany her articles every time, and those photos also present the same quiet and intelligent-looking young woman. This image of an educated, thoughtful and capable young woman with taste is central to her writing career, as can be seen in the voice she assumes in one of her columns:

> In between love and contempt, there are several stages. Even if you miss them one by one, or you cheat yourself and will not admit, when it comes to contempt, there is no turning back. Because we can never despise someone we still love, but only despise those we do not.[89]

This is a generalised observation regarding relationships. The important point is not whether this applies to any particular reader, but to show off Zhang as a rational and clear-minded sage when giving advice on romantic relationships.

Not only does she assume this agony aunt role in her columns, but in her novels one of the women protagonists will always assume this role of the neutral narrator, who talks rationally and gives comments from a more rational point of view. One can see Cheng Yun, in *Mianbaoshu shang de nuren*, Shen Yu in *Mai haitun de nuhai*,[90] Zhou Rui in *San ge A Cup de nuren*, and Qiu Huaner in *Zaijian ye youshu*, as an alternative voice of the author because they represent a similar rationality in the face of romantic relationships despite the various frustrating experience each of them has. In Zhang's fictional world, there are also young independent women who assume a similar role as her narrator in the column, young rational women who have the ability to analyse romantic relationships and generalise upon them.

These maxims, which are scattered about in her novels, on the covers of her

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channels for spotting young creative writers, because of the annual novel-competition, whose prize includes a writer's contract.

[89] Xiaoxian Zhang 張小嫻, "Ai yu bishi" 愛與鄙視 [Love and Contempt], *Huangguan zazhi* 皇冠雜誌 [Crown Magazine], 533 (1998), 32.

[90] Xiaoxian Zhang 張小嫻, *Mai haitun de nuhai* 賣海豚的女孩 [The Girl Who Sells Dolphin] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1995).

books and in her columns, inhabit a central role in her writing. Here are a few examples:

> A woman can do for love what she normally cannot do.[91]

> There is no need to let a person know you love him, if you can give up everything else for him, that is only the minimum charge, that is your obligation.[92]

> He does not send me red roses any more. Maybe he has forgotten ever transforming into a nightingale before. Men are such people, once they have taken possession, they forget what they have done.[93]

Content in these maxims is not so important as the form, for they have a specific function to serve in a commercial society like Hong Kong. Chen Jialing in her article writes:

> Zhang Xiaoxian's soaring to fame is an example. Not only does she inherit the tradition of other intellectual female writers like Lin Yanni,[94] but she successfully expands the role of 'intellectual female writer' to a professional stage of 'romance analyst'. Zhang is not only a popular romantic writer, but also an expert on handling contemporary romantic relationships.[95]

She presents herself as a professional not only because in an extremely commercial society professionalism is respected, but obviously there is a need in the readership

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[91] Xiaoxian Zhang 張小嫻, *Zaijian ye youshu* 再見野鼬鼠 [Goodbye Rodent] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1996), 237.

[92] Xiaoxian Zhang 張小嫻, *Hebao li de danrenchuang* 荷包裏的單人床 [The Single Bed in the Wallet] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1997), 170.

[93] Xiaoxian Zhang 張小嫻, *San yue li de xingfubing* 三月裏的幸福餅 [Fortune Cookies in March] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1997), 161-62.

[94] Yanni Lin 林燕妮, one famous writer in Hong Kong. Started writing in the 1980s, she was one of the earliest intellectual female writers because she was highly educated, and already a successful career woman before writing. Her image was a romantic writer, who claims her novels written with perfume. For details of her work, please refer to Liu's *Xianggang wenxueshi* 香港文學史 [Hong Kong Literary History] (Hong Kong: Zuojia chubanshe, 1997), 391-95 for an introduction.

[95] Jialing Chen 陳嘉玲, "Yi ge aiqing liuxing xiaoshuojia de chansheng: Zhang Xiaoxian de wenhua jiazhi" 一個愛情流行小說家的產生：張小嫻的文化價值 [The Birth of a Romantic Writer: Cultural Value of Zhang Xiaoxian], Qingqiao Chen 陳清僑 ed, *Wenhua xiangxiang yu yishixingtai: Dangdai Xianggang wenhua zhengshi lunping* 文化想像與意識形態：當代香港文化政治論評 [Cultural Imagination and Ideology: Criticisms on Contemporary Hong Kong Cultural Politics] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1997), 219.

for such an authority. Since the 1960s when column writing became a popular form, there have been specific problem-solving columns in the papers and magazines encouraging readers' participation. Zhang's novels, as well as her columns, can be seen as another form of this advice-giving authority because she has set herself up as a professional.

It is not difficult to understand the emergence of such romance analyst as Zhang Xiaoxian. With more married women joining the workforce, the connection between mother and children has been loosened simply because of the lack of contact time. Hong Kong society is producing new generations of young women who see their peer group much more than their own mothers. The characters in Zhang's novels are a good illustration of this phenomenon. The young women are usually of similar age, either school friends or colleagues, and because of the time they spend together, they form a much tighter network than they do with their family members. This is an interesting twist to the relationship as shown in the previous chapter. A women's bond is created among the younger generation, and this in turn means a different understanding of motherhood in the literary scene in Hong Kong.

If mothers and daughters form a vertical continuous lineage from one generation to another, the dominant form of relationship seen in Zhang's novels is otherwise. Young women who are school friends form a horizontal link with one another, and this link has replaced the mother-daughter link in terms both of their power of influence and the individual's adherence to it. That is why mothers are never featured as important figures in her novels. It is also the reason why the image of Zhang's narrators as experts on romance analysis is so popular. The expert, who can be relied upon to understand what is needed in dealing with

romantic relationships in contemporary society, has replaced the role played by the mother in previous generations of Chinese women as the one who takes care of the daughter's emotional problems because they have experience.

What cannot be seen in the fictional world of Zhang, is the relevance of the mother's experience to the daughter. The young women's romantic encounters are all presented as individual worlds of their own, cut off from the past as well as the future. This isolation has created a strong sense of independence in both the young female characters and by extension the kind of world they inhabit. Not only is the mother-daughter vertical link of history flattened out into a lateral link among the young peer group, the overall sense of historicity is also eliminated in Zhang's fictional world, beginning with *Mianbaoshu shang de nuren*.[96]

The speed with which things go out of date renders the mother's experience quickly irrelevant to daughters in their late 20s to early 30s. The new generation of young women who were born in the 1970s and came of age in the 1990s enjoy a new independence totally non-existent in their mother's experience. This is the generation which is situated at a point in history when the past is irrelevant and the future too uncertain to foresee. Presented in writing, this isolation from history becomes a flattening sense of time, not exactly compressing the flow of time into immediate moments following one another, but rather a detachment of the present moment from any sense of history. Plots unfold, characters move with the story, but the sense of time passing and its impact does not seem to leave an impression on either the development of the plot or the characters themselves. One vivid example

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[96] The editor, Zhou Shuping 周淑屏, of Zhang Xiaoxian's novel introduces the book as, "This is an autobiographical novel, recording the youth, sadness and fall of the main character Cheng Yun and her good friends." It was printed on the book inside the back cover of *Mianbaoshu shang de nuren* 麵包樹上的女人 [The Woman on the Bread Tree] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1997).

of this "instantisation" of history can be found in *Hebao li de danrenchuang* when a gigantic poster is made based on the love story between Yunsheng and Su Ying[97] to promote the restaurant.

The quality of this advertisement outside a department store has something in common with the quality of Zhang's novels, that of a snapshot, which captures a moment in time and freezes it into a permanent present. The story between Yunsheng and A Su has been turned into a huge two-dimensional image to be displayed. The private, the emotional depth has been flattened to an image, used to attract totally unrelated people to come to a restaurant which is not even the same establishment where the original couple met. The personal story of Yunsheng and A Su has become effective advertisement, whose degree of success is measured by the number of people visiting the restaurant, just as in *Mianbaoshu shang de nuren* Lin Fengwen publicises his feelings for Cheng Yun in the lyrics of popular songs.

Privacy seems to have been exploded by the penetrating media which blows up the images, repeats the words so often and to such an extent that the emotional depth of the cultural products turns into a surface attractiveness. In *Sanyue li de xingfubing*, finally Xu Wenzhi and Zhou Qingting have to separate for various reasons. Zhou Qingting says:

> On the evening of 30th June 1997, a new era was born. It was raining cats and dogs the whole day, the same rain when we first met. I was wearing the lemon yellow raincoat, walking alone outside Times Square. A song of farewell was broadcasting from the gigantic TV screen.
> 'Separation is originally our shared helplessness.' I heard Wenzhi's voice.
> Looking back, his face was on the TV screen, he, in Beijing.[98]

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[97] Xiaoxian Zhang 張小嫻, *Hebao li de danrenchuang* 荷包裏的單人床 [The Single Bed in the Wallet] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1997), 73-74.

[98] Xiaoxian Zhang 張小嫻, *San yue li de xingfubing* 三月裏的幸福餅 [Fortune Cookies in March] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1997), 235-36.

What Wenzhi, a journalist sent to cover the reunification of Hong Kong to China, says on TV can be interpreted both as a public statement and as his personal message to the narrator. It is a moment of the clash between the historical and the fictional, for June 30th 1997 was a real historical moment for people in Hong Kong, and it interacts with the fictional scenario in this novel. The moment of Hong Kong's unification with its motherland coincides with the moment of separation between the narrator and her lover. The reunion with one's motherland does not help at all, her Wenzhi is far away in Beijing, voicing his helplessness on TV to his departed lover. The total solitude of both Wenzhi and Qingting at the moment of reunification with the mother is a manifestation of this paradoxical state of affairs. The mother's traditional role of providing a sense of orientation is not only lost, here to Qingting, there seems to be absolutely no need of the mother at all.

Besides time, human connection is also flattened out, as seen in the kind of contact between Wenzhi and Qingting. Qingting sees him on the TV screen, miles away, but there is no real contact between them. What they have is only a highly sophisticated transferral of images and sounds through the use of telecommunication equipment, which does not provide authentic human touch at all. Yet this technology is supposed to be developed for the shortening of distance between human beings. With telecommunication, the meaning of distance and time has changed and they are not proportional to each other anymore. Places far away from each other become dots on a map whose distance from each other depends not on the space in between them, but on the methods available to overcome this space. On the back cover of *Hebao li de danrenchuang*, Zhang writes:

> The greatest distance in the world, is not the distance between life and death, not between ends of the world, it is when I stand before you, and you do not know I

love you.[99]

In a highly technologically developed society, distance has lost its meaning.

In *Zaijian ye youshu*, Gao Haiming flies off to different parts of the world to get away from the emotional entanglement with Qiu Huaner, but this physical distance does not create an emotional distance from her. In *Sanyue li de xingfubing*, Zhou Qingting travels all over the world to struggle for her personal success, but finally the capitals of those countries become almost exchangeable with each other because distance in between does not mean anything anymore. In other words, the concepts of time and space as a coherent linearity linking different generations together through their relation to each other have completely lost their original significance.

What has gained importance in this fictional community where individuals are completely detached from each other is the object. Being unable to respond emotionally to one another, the characters invest all their emotional intensity in objects, which are plentiful in Zhang's novels. *Hebao li de danrenchuang* is full of objects, all assigned meanings and values by the protagonists who find it impossible to relate to each other. Su Ying is by profession a merchandiser, she is responsible for buying things to fulfil her customers' desires. Even when it is not related to her job, she is constantly buying:

> On my last day in Madrid, I found a delicate handmade tile in a tile shop....I bought that tile and put it in my backpack.[100]
>
> That day, I went to buy lipstick with Wai Tsun.[101]
>
> When I took the tile to mount, I passed by a shop selling Italian lights, my eye

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[99] Xiaoxian Zhang 張小嫻, back cover, *Hebao li de danrenchuang* 荷包裏的單人床 [The Single Bed in the Wallet] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1997).

[100] Ibid., 32.

[101] Ibid., 112.

was caught by a chandelier inside....I bought it because of the name.[102]

These are but some of the examples. She meets Qin because both of them want to buy the same heater. When Su Ying quarrels with her boyfriend and moves out of their shared flat, she takes the heater because it has already become a symbol of her connection with Qin.

Objects becomes the emotional content for different characters. *Sange A Cup de nuren* is a novel about three young women who relate to each other by the sizes of the brassieres they wear.[103] Not only that, but their romantic experience, which is the focus of the novel, seems to be closely connected to the sizes of their figures too. In *Sanyue li de xingfubing*, it is the fortune cookies which the lovers take in one of their favourite restaurants that become the object invested with their emotional expectations of one another. And in *Zaijian ye youshu* it is the various models of airfighters which take up the symbolic significance of the lovers' feelings for one another.

To a certain extent Zhang's fictional world is not only a colourful world of people coming and going and changing partners. It is a world where an expert on romantic relationships is needed because of the mutation undergone by society. Objects take the place of emotional depth, real time and space play no part in the networks which bind people together. Seeing this world as a reflection of Hong Kong in the last three decades of the twentieth century, the features examined in the texts gain an extra dimension to their popularity. What follows in this last section

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[102] Ibid., 126-27.

[103] In the novel, the three protagonists, Zhou Rui, Xu Yu and You Ying, are all young women in their late 20s or early 30s. Zhou Rui is the first person narrator, and her central position in the story can be seen by her figure. She is a 34A and this medium size in between Xu Yu's 36A and You Ying's 32A also tells her more rational personality. Just like other of Zhang's narrators, she has her own experiences but is always a representative of the more sensible and analytic voice of the author, who

of the chapter is a look at another female writer in Hong Kong, whose work expresses an individual sentiment towards life in a place like Hong Kong at this time in history. The reading of Huang Biyun's work will round off this chapter.

When Liu introduces Huang Biyun in his *Xianggang wenxueshi* he discusses her Hong Kong complex:

> The biggest difference between Huang Biyun and the majority of female writers in Hong Kong, is her consistent 'Hong Kong complex.' This 'Hong Kong complex' encompasses her background and experience, includes her basic sentiments and thoughts. She wanders everywhere, hiding and avoiding, but yearning from afar, wondering where home is ... 'Hong Kong complex' is the secret in Huang Biyun's heart. This untold secret is poisoning her heart and mind, but Huang Biyun seems to indulge in this poison, taking pleasure in the gnawing of her heart. As time goes by, even ugliness and evil become objects for appreciation. The ugliness and evil in her stories have already gathered into a mass, becoming a stylistic component of her creativity.[104]

Although this complex is highly personalised, consisting of her individual experience and relating to her particular background, it contains something which Liu identifies as specific to Hong Kong, or to Huang's experience of Hong Kong. It consists of her secret yearning for Hong Kong, ironically a place whose status as home is highly problematic. It seems that to the Huang Biyun depicted by Liu, Hong Kong is a place of origin she can relate to, because even from afar she yearns for it. However at the same time, as seen from the other depictions so far, Hong Kong is itself a symbol of instability and mutation, a daughter whose origin cannot be easily determined. The "Hong Kong complex" may well be a sense of insecurity regarding her orientation, for her representation of Hong Kong is in many ways similar to the others examined so far.

This sense of insecurity in her stories is closely connected to an inability to

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poses as an expert on romantic relationships.

[104] Denghan Liu 劉登翰, *Xianggang wenxuechi* 香港文學史 [Hong Kong Literary History] (Hong Kong: zuojia chubanshe, 1997), 380-81.

accept the state of her orientation. There are mother figures in her stories, some mothers play relatively important roles in the life of the protagonists and some do not, but the shared feature of these dead or living mothers is the inability to assume, almost a turning away from, the role of someone who provides a link between the daughter and an origin which will psychologically stabilise the daughter's fear and uncertainty about her life. Instead, the mother is portrayed very clearly as the life-giver, but one very different from the benevolent all-embracing protector one usually associates with the mother image. Love and protection seem to be qualities whose absence in Huang Biyun's novels are clearly felt, and felt for a reason. The overall feeling of darkness, evil, uncertainty and loneliness overflows the stories and constructs an isolated world of absolute loneliness.

Huang's stories are sometimes difficult to understand, one of her more conventional short stories which presents a relatively clear line of development is "Tashi nuzi, wo yeshi nuzi."[105] Even in a love story like this, one can immediately see differences from those of Yi Shu and Zhang Xiaoxian, not only because this is a failed love story of two women, but because of something essentially lacking in the characters. Liu's introduction of her work also mentions this feature:

> Huang Biyun's novels mainly feature a young female narrator. She has dispensed with the conventionality of describing personal characteristics, and even if she does write about them it is only briefly. The result is, those women characters who appear in different stories finally come down to a vivid image: female, young, born in Hong Kong, wander all over the world, have one or more men, always quarrel and patch up, coming together and separating, very sensitive, very sad, very tired, not thinking about the future and not realising the present, stretching till it is impossible to continue living, then inevitably hurting themselves or other people.[106]

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[105] Biyun Huang 黃碧雲, "Tashi nuzi, wo yeshi nuzi" 她是女子, 我也是女子 [She is a girl, and so am I], *Qi Hou* 其後 [And Then] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1994), 1-18.

[106] Denghan Liu 劉登翰, *Xianggang wenxuechi* 香港文學史 [Hong Kong Literary History] (Hong Kong: zuojia chubanshe, 1997), 379.

This is an apt description of quite a typical image of her character. They engage in all sorts of daily activities, meeting people, coming together and separating, working, eating, thinking, getting married and raising a family, but, among all these activities, what seems to be missing is the element of love. There are quite a number of stories about couples and would-be-couples, but the absence of love is brutally presented.

The first sentence in "Tashi nuzi, wo yeshi nuzi" is: " - Originally I thought I and Zhixing could live our lives together."[107] The last sentence is: "- But why? Originally I thought I and Zhixing could live our lives together."[108] The last moment of the story is a repetition of the beginning of the story, with an additional questioning after failure. Zhixing yearns for something much more practical and material than the narrator can give her, and compared to what the narrator has to offer, fame, material luxury and comfort seem so banal and uninteresting. In this supposedly alternative love affair, what prevents the final union between the two women is not the unconventionality of their relationship, but on the contrary extremely conventional matters like money and comfort. This may be the biggest irony to the expectations of the readers. Love is never mentioned in the story openly. The narrator has not declared her love for Zhixing, she only mentions it in passing in the narration.

This may be the saddest reality in Huang's fictional world, that people's weaknesses are such that grand sentiments and principles are never realised on the one hand, and never take people to their desired end on the other. Her

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[107] Biyun Huang 黃碧雲, "Tashi nuzi, wo yeshi nuzi" 她是女子, 我也是女子 [She is a girl, and so am I], *Qi Hou* 其後 [And Then] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1994), 1.

[108] Ibid., 18.

disappointment in love in this story may have bigger reverberations than just a distrust in romantic love. While Zhixing and the narrator, Ye Xixi, are linked to each other very much in the way Zhang's characters relate to one another, the sense of female camaraderie is not quite there. Ye Xixi is clearly disillusioned. Her disillusionment takes an extremely upsetting form not because she is very sad in this matter, but because she behaves quite mildly in the face of such great loss:

> I start to wear only purple-blue and black. I quit smoking, drink only water and become a vegetarian. Other people tear their hearts out when they fall out of love, I feel extraordinarily peaceful ....I embrace myself, saying, 'I still have this.'[109]

The disillusionment does not push her to seek another companion, or another kind of support. What she finally embraces is her own self, in total isolation. Towards the end of the story, she remembers a series of episodes with Zhixing, but she does not look forward. Memory does not serve as a means of preparing her for a better future, only as a reminder of what she has lost. The end of the story once again cuts the individual off from any constructive human relationship.

History is manifested as equally useless in "Turan wo jiqi ni de nian."[110] Remembering and forgetting are not just activities people take up unconsciously in the midst of other daily activities, but have become major events in life because the various characters seem to spend all their time remembering, forgetting, trying to remember and trying to forget. The story starts with, "I suddenly remember her face, then I become old just like that,"[111] which is repeated several times in the story. Remembering is an important event in the story because remembrance has great

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[109] Ibid., 17.

[110] Biyun Huang 黃碧雲, "Turan wo jiqi ni de nian" 突然我記起你的臉 [Suddenly I Remember Your Face], in *Qizhong jingmo* 七種靜默 [Seven Kinds of Silence] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1997), 1-41.

effects over the present of the one who remembers:

> One day when he is old, suddenly he remembers her face. The only lack in his life is completed. His existence then becomes meaningless.[112]

Remembering becomes the last accomplishment in his life, so important and definitive that once it is achieved, the person can die. Stories, or images from the past bring about the dead end, but not an opening for a future.

If memory represents a root, the orientation on which a person can rely for support to struggle for future life, then the kind of memory specified in this story is counter-productive. Unlike the stories told by mothers and mother surrogates in the previous chapter, stories from the past act like a death wish, taking away the desire for life. Memory becomes a jumbled mess of information whose occurrence interferes with the normal flow of life. If we read this side by side with Huang's Hong Kong complex, then the resulting interpretation of the images produced in her writing can be unnerving about Hong Kong's relationship with her motherland. While Xi Xi, Yi Shu and Zhang Xiaoxian have all dealt with this maternal bond between Hong Kong and her mother, the general impression from their fictional representation is rather an individualism in the Hong Kong identity without much reference to her Chinese roots.

What Huang Biyun has done is quite different. There is the same refusal in her characters to rely on the mother for help, or on the mother substitutes for consolation. Biological mothers are present but they do not offer help, moreover daughters simply do not expect help from them. Sisterhood does not seem adequate, as it is in some of Zhang Xiaoxian's stories, in taking its place. What is

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[111] Ibid., 1.

[112] Ibid., 7.

left is only stories, histories, narratives of the past which are symbolically a person's adherence to a point of origin. But in "Turan wo jiqi ni de nian," memory materialises in the Diamond of Hope and brings with it destruction wherever and whenever it lands. The story shifts in time and space very quickly from one narrator's point of view to another, without any preparation for the reader as the shifts take place.

The narrative starts in London with a middle age second-hand shop owner, who comes into contact with this diamond through an old customer. After selling this diamond to the owner, the customer dies in the snow, thus begins the narrative of the diamond. The shop owner comes from Czechoslovakia, but his country has already been split into two strange places to him. Home to him is only a concept with no solid existence, and that is why he goes to other places and opens a secondhand shop called Bohemia, as befits his state of exile. What the narrator finally does is to tell a story, a story about a diamond which comes from an exile who has stories but no home. Stories, unlike those told by Brave Orchid to Maxine, can no longer provide a space of belonging to the owner.

Then the story is taken over by other voices from other times. The narrators do not share a common ground except that they are all wanderers in life, without a place where they belong and they all come into contact with the diamond by some unexpected means, and bad luck always follows. At a point when the diamond comes into the hands of a priest, he decides to destroy it. "'Diamond of Hope' brings misfortune only because there is temptation,"[113] he says. The "Diamond of Hope" ironically carries memories, and the power of remembered past seems insurmountable:

> The diamond decomposes in the intensive light rays of the laboratory, becomes carbon atoms. We cannot witness the process of it turning into ashes, just as coffins are hidden in the incinerators. The result is always the same, dust to dust, ashes to ashes, even diamonds cannot be exempted.[114]

The destruction of this diamond is depicted in terms of the incineration of dead bodies, simultaneously turning it into another piece of memory. Though this process cannot be seen, it is recorded in this story, as the narrator priest ends by saying, "Legend has it that gems and love and tears are related, wonder if it is like this,"[115] lining up the various elements of memory.

"Chuang shiji"[116] is a more direct discussion of the concept of one's roots, motherhood, mother's stories, and the source of life. This Genesis can be read as an anti-narrative because the one who is creating the world in the story is You Yian, whose name means "by darkness," a woman, later a mother who bears a life of evil in her body. She has no great attributes, an ordinary woman leading the most ordinary life. Yian's creation depicted in this contemporary Hong Kong novel is anti-Genesis:

> The belly bursts, the greens withers, rivers dry up, lions roar and pace, crows pick the eyes of the blue whale in the night of the full moon: woman will give birth to a monstrous child.[117]

Woman is still the source of life, but as her name suggests, it is the life of darkness which she is harbouring. As if this image of the monstrous child were not clear enough, later in the story, other symbols and objects of evil abound. The serpent

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[113] Ibid., 26.

[114] Ibid., 41.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Biyun Huang 黃碧雲, "Chuang shiji" 創世紀 [Genesis] in *Qizhong jingmo* 七種靜默 [Seven Kinds of Silence] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1997), 43-69.

[117] Ibid., 44.

has taken the place of the new life in this woman creator's belly. The mother has become the bearer of evil and destruction, and what makes it worse is no one knows about this danger. The destructiveness of the mother's body is not an accident which occurs here only, but a recurrent feature of Huang's stories.

In "Qizhong jingmo,"[118] the relationship between the couple has inexplicable problems, husband and wife have lost communication with each other, and he starts to fear her. He is afraid of her not because she cheats him, which she does, but because of some unknown power inherent in her body. In a scene when they lay in bed together:

> Ruai embraces him softly, putting his head between her breasts, patting him. Her hairy body is like a spider. He cannot escape. In the web of silky thread, he is tortured to death.[119]

The imagery of the spider and her web is self-explanatory. He is afraid of the power of her sex, her desire, and her ability to overwhelm and finally digest him. More specifically, the organ which he fears is the womb: "Love is the source of all sins. My love is even darker and greedier than the womb."[120] Three things are worth attention. The organ which gives birth is depicted instead as the organ which takes. Instead of giving and nurturing a new life, the womb devours.

The second thing is the understanding of love. Again, instead of thinking of it as giving and sacrificing, it is the source of sins because it makes people greedy and possessive. Whether romantic love, or maternal love, the understanding here colours Huang's fictional world in a negative sense, turning rules upside down.

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[118] Biyun Huang 黃碧雲, "Qizhong jingmo"七種靜默 [Seven Kinds of Silence] in *Qizhong jingmo* 七種靜默 [Seven Kinds of Silence] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1997), 127-342.

[119] Ibid., 138.

[120] Ibid., 141.

For it seems that the last refuge for human beings, the ability to love another has lost its function to protect. Human beings cannot rest in life and certainly daughters cannot rely on mothers anymore because the power given to mothers in their ability to give birth is for annihilation rather than creation. In this fictional world, the mothers, instead of providing a sense of home for the daughter, is a point of erasure, extermination of life and story. For the daughter to survive, the way is therefore a struggle with the dark annihilation of the mother.

The last thing lies in the name of the wife, Ruai, meaning "similar to love." She is a wife and a mother, so she is a convergence of two types of love, and two kinds of power, both represented as destructive. Her love for her husband scares him and the power of her sex threatens him. On the other hand, the husband is also trying to prevent her maternal power from harming their son. This woman Ruai, just like love, is a double force of destruction in this world. Towards the end of the story, the nameless narrator writes: "Man thinks they have created the entire world, they however are betrayed by the world they created."[121] The paradox in the story is the great betrayal suffered by humankind because of their disbelief, or overestimation of themselves. What is seen as a manifestation of power is in fact a trap:

> Man creates the world by imagination and mistake, they create God to explain the existence of man. Women use darkness, warmth and blood to become the coolest and most evil accomplice. They understand the message in the Seventh Seal. But they cannot say.
> That is why women write.[122]

Woman is in the know all the time, she knows that the creation of the world and its representation as a constructive world is a hoax, but she has the power and she lets

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[121] Ibid., 67.

[122] Ibid., 68.

the deception go on, in fact facilitates the deception because she understands.

A woman cannot tell because she understands the message in the Seventh Seal. She has no other way of delivering the message except to write it. This is a moment of final collapse in her writing, because she is bringing the themes and images of her fictional world to the reader's world, by mentioning herself. You Yian is the representative of the mother-creator who is engaged in massive destruction of the world, knowing that she is an accomplice in a big hoax, but unable to say so. At one point of the story, she is voicing her opinion about her fortunate family life to a group of audience in a TV show:

> This .. it is best not to let people know, not even for the left hand to know what the right hand has done .... If unfortunately the others know, rather let them know than let them see .... Even in case people see, then never admit. Anyway every one has his own lines to say, never go up to the stage and accuse: you are pretending, you make things up. Everybody pretends to be normal, and then things will be fine, there will be happiness.[123]

She has just won the Happiest Family Contest and is giving advice to the audience. At one level, she may be giving authentic advice to the fictional audience, but on the other hand, what she says has the same ring as the nameless narrator about the world, women, and the writer.

Huang Biyun's stories have taken the discussion of Hong Kong literary writing to an extremely difficult end. Her world is harsh, for where people normally find consolation and comfort, she depicts the most deceptive evil trap. The mother figure in her world has become an accomplice of the devil, better to be avoided than sought. Her personal experience which gives her intense insecurity and a lack of orientation is part and parcel of her identity as a woman born and raised in Hong Kong. Therefore the eternal exile, the wanderer who cannot locate a refuge in the

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[123] Ibid., 68-69.

wide world can be an apt description of what a person living in Hong Kong at this point of history feels like.

The sense of insecurity expressed in Huang's stories has completely overturned all ideas about the role of the mother, putting mother side by side with death. But surprisingly enough, this negative image of the mother is not alone among the other Hong Kong writers examined here. Xi Xi has a lighter way of expression, but the dead, the living and the surrogate mothers in her work cannot live up to the expectations of the daughters. They are no source of emotional comfort and therefore not indeed needed. Aunt Yifen only provides the material side of sustenance and is no substitute mother, for instead of giving the girl a story to live on, she erases history. Motherhood is already dead in Xi Xi's stories.

Yi Shu's and Zhang Xiaoxian's more popular romance fictions operate at a much simpler and light-hearted level. Romance comes and goes, there are disappointments, defeats and most importantly there is never a promise of a benevolent future. The absence of a helpful mother, as well as the presence of a peer group of support to replace the disappeared mother, is an alternative expression of the refusal to rely on the mother anymore. Just like Xi Xi and Huang Biyun, the writer's representations shift from a focus on the previous generation as origin of identification to attention on the peer group as a network to rely on. History does not play a part in the lives of these young women anymore because they cannot rely on history for their present world; experience, advice from the mother and mother surrogates are better hidden because they are outdated already. Maternal support has gone with history.

This literary assassination of the mother expresses a hidden fear, though not as dark as the murderous mother in "Chuang shiji." Lining up the publication dates of

these stories, it is not difficult to make a connection between the intensity of this fear and the impending reunification of Hong Kong with Mainland China the motherland. Apart from the mass of theoretical and ideological observations and discussions about the identity of a Hong Kong culture in the face of the imminent date, these fictions written by four female Hong Kong writers who are active in different periods may present an aspect of what this cultural split with Mainland China one and a half century ago has done implicitly to some people in Hong Kong. On top of everything else, the fear, anxiety, disturbance, uncertainty, and mistrust of the mother figure may find its voice in the various mothers represented in the novels.

## Chapter Three

## Taiwanese Women Writers In Search of Identity

After a study of the Hong Kong literary scene, the subject of Taiwan female writing is a natural continuation, because in many ways Taiwan claims sisterhood with Hong Kong, especially through its ambiguous link with the Mainland. The overseas Chinese communities, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China constitute the major image and content of Chinese when the qualifier is used, and it is this Chinese-ness exhibited in their own contemporary female literature which constitutes the framework of this research. Motherhood, as understood both at the contextual and inter-textual level, takes an interesting form not only within the individual texts of some contemporary writers, but manifests its power of construction through a general cultural trait in the writing of these four different Chinese communities.

Taiwan, or more officially, the National Republic of China, has a colonial history like Hong Kong, though the colonial past is more complicated. Having been invaded by Spain, the Netherlands, France and Japan, and then liberated by the United States, the cultural heritage of this small island has been variously imprinted upon it. The most recent, and the most powerful external influence is that of Japan. From 1895 onwards, Taiwan was in the grip of exclusive Japanese cultural invasion, to the extent that the Chinese language was subordinated to Japanese.[1] A result of

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[1] Japan ruled over Taiwan as a colony from 1895 to 1945, when she surrendered unconditionally. Within these five decades, there was a period of more intensive control over local culture. Between 1937 and 1945, the Chinese language was replaced by Japanese not only as the official language, but also in the field of education and publication. Chinese was no longer taught in schools, and writers had to learn to use Japanese in order to be published. The period creates a big gap in the cultural coherence in that generation, because an entire group of people were deprived of their mother tongue. For a summary of 70 years of Taiwan literary development, please refer to Lai He 賴和, *Lai He ji* 賴

these years of cultural domination is a long period of cultural suppression. As the ability to read and write in another language became the factor determining publication during the Japanese occupation, literary publications from Taiwan writers were not abundant.

*Ya Xi Ya de guer*[2] by Wu Zhuoliu[3] is regarded as a representative narrative of Taiwan in the period because the protagonist's wandering from place to place is a parallel to the mentality of the Taiwan people. The protagonist is a Taiwan student in Japan. Although initially supporting Japan's education practices in Taiwan, his encounter with discrimination plants doubts in his heart about these practices. Unemployed in Taiwan, he sees the Mainland as an alternative, but is suspected of being a spy for Japan. Later he returns to Taiwan and is treated as a foreign agent by the Japanese. Yang I:

> The work shows from different perspectives Japanese colonisers' invasion into Taiwan's political, economic, military and cultural integrity. In the specific historical period, among the complicated relations between Taiwan and Japan, and Taiwan and the motherland, the hero's mentality moves from frustrated compromise to conscious rebellion. This indirectly but powerfully depicts the painful journey Taiwan, as a once cut off 'orphan of Asia', takes to return to her motherland.[4]

Alienation, frustration, loneliness and rootlessness are the identifying features

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和集 [Collection of Lai He's Writings], Taiwan zuojia quanji. Duanpian xiaoshuo juan/ Ri ju shidai 臺灣作家全集. 短篇小說卷/ 日據時代 [Taiwan Writers, Short Fiction - Japanese Occupation] (Taibei shi: Qianwei chubanshe, 1991).

[2] *Ya Xi Ya de guer* 亞細亞的孤兒 [The Orphan of Asia], by Zhuoliu Wu 吳濁流. The book was finished a little before the end of the Second World War, originally called *Hu Taiming* 胡太明, later modified and published as *Ya Xi Ya de guer* by Taibei Huanan chubanshe in 1962.

[3] Zhuoliu Wu 吳濁流 (1900-1976), originally called Jiantian Wu 吳建田. Born in Taiwan. He resigned from his job at a Taiwan school because he witnessed unfair treatment to local teachers from Japanese administration. Later he worked as a journalist in the Mainland and then back at Taiwan. One of his major works *Ya Xi Ya de guer,* was recognised as a work bridging the old and new Taiwan literature.

[4] I Yang 楊義, *Ershi shiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo yu wenhua* 二十世紀中國小說與文化 [Twentieth Century Chinese Novel and Culture] (Taibei shi: Ye qiang chubanshe, 1993), 250.

of Wu Zhuoliu's generation. As depicted in the experience of Hu Taiming, Taiwanese of that generation have a birth place, but this piece of land is so much occupied by another power that it is no longer a home to them. The title of the book, *Ya Xi Ya de guer* [The Asian Orphan], is a vivid description of the mental state of this generation. The Taiwanese are compared to orphans who belong nowhere, not even to their native land, Taiwan. The Japanese occupation ended on 4th August 1945 with Japan's unconditional surrender. Taiwan was liberated, but decades of occupation had already created a void in the social and cultural spheres of the community because this period saw not only the operation of the Japanese system, but also the severance of Taiwan's ties with the Mainland.

1949 marks another important date in the history of modern Taiwan, because the retreat of the National KMT government meant not only a split in the Chinese culture into two streams, but a continuation of the decades-long struggle between Taiwan and the Mainland for the legitimacy of cultural heritage, still unresolved at present.[5] This date is significant for it marks the beginning of Taiwan's 50-year struggle for a new identity in relation to the Mainland, which had sovereignty over Taiwan before the Japanese occupation. The literature of modern Taiwan is to a certain extent a preoccupation with this search for identity.

In many ways, Taiwan's status in relation to China is comparable to that between Hong Kong and China. While Liu, the editor of *Xianggang wenxue shi*, regards Hong Kong literature as a branch of Mainland literature, the same has been said of modern Taiwan literature. In a book of critical essays on Taiwan and Hong

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[5] At the time when this dissertation was going through the final edition, relations between the Mainland and Taiwan suddenly tensed up again due to a speech made by Li Denghui, President of Taiwan, about the relations between the two Chinese communities. He used "special state-to-state basis" to describe the way they communicate with each other, and that received heated responses from the Mainland, because that implies a recognition of Taiwan as an independent sovereign state.

Kong literary writings,[6] Lin looks at the terms "Taiwan Literature" and "Taiwan Consciousness":

> 'Taiwan Literature' and 'Taiwan Consciousness' were originally good ideas, without any political intention. Later some people intentionally distort their meanings, detaching 'Taiwan Literature' and 'Taiwan Consciousness' from the realm of Chinese literature and Chinese consciousness, and, by extension, denying the reality of Taiwan being part of Chinese land, to plot for the conspiracy of a politically independent Taiwan.[7]

Compared to what Liu has written about Hong Kong, Lin has taken a much stronger view about the origin of Taiwan literature, relating it immediately to a negative political intention of separating Taiwan from its rightful sovereign the Mainland, seeing it as sharing the same heritage and a branch of the mainstream Chinese Literature.

This is slightly different from the centre-subordinate relationship Liu grants to Hong Kong under Mainland China. For Lin claims that Taiwan and Mainland China stand side by side with each other as illustrations of Chinese culture:

> Although the relationship between Taiwan literature and Mainland Chinese literature has been forced to be maintained in a long-term separation, looking back today, one will see that the two sides of the channel have always been developing towards the same direction, showing their commonalities clearly.[8]

He then goes on to illustrate what he considers to be the common features of the literatures of Taiwan and Mainland China. These include the dominant ideology of realism; an on-going attempt to revise literary development, taking Western literature as examples; and a similarity between languages.[9] Whether these features are representative qualities to show the family ties between the two literatures is

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[6] Chenghuang Lin 林承璜, *Taiwan Xianggang wenxue pinglunji* 台灣香港文學評論集 [Taiwan Hong Kong Literary Criticisms] (Fuzhou: Hai Xia wenyi chubanshe, 1994).

[7] Ibid., 1-2.

[8] Ibid., 2.

debatable, but the existence of such strong views deepens the problem of Taiwan's cultural origin.[10]

On the other side of this Taiwan-Mainland and Chinese identity debate, there is the theory of the Local (本土論), which defines Taiwan as an independent entity, not so much as a political independent state, but more a unified mental power which engages in a revolutionary struggle for self definition. Peng Ruijin,[11] when talking about the theory of the Local, writes:

> In the 1980s during the debate about Taiwan literature, it has already been proved that in both literature and culture, if there is no assumption of a Mother country, there will not be any separatist activity. The theory of the Local emphasises resistance, and there is no resistance without oppression, without oppression there is no existence. Those embracing the Motherland theory should know better than to re-emphasise the geographical and historical link between Taiwan and China, or to re-establish Taiwan literary history from the period when

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[9] Ibid., 2-6.

[10] Lin is not the only critic who holds the view that Taiwan belongs to the same culture as Mainland China, and thus should be seen as a branch of Chinese culture, side by side with the Mainland. In Shuyang Wang 王淑秧, *Haixia liangan xiaoshuo lunping* 海峽兩岸小說論評 [Critical Commentary on Novels from Both Sides of the Channel] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1992), the same view is put forward in her essay "The National Consciousness in Taiwan Fiction before the Liberation (150-65)," though in not as strong a tone as Lin in his book. In the concluding remarks, Wang writes, "the national consciousness rooted in Chinese Nationalism for thousands of years makes the sons of China never forget they are Chinese, a member of the Chinese race. This nationalism is not only strongly expressed in the Taiwan fiction before Liberation, even today, it is still widely present in Taiwan literature (165)." Although Wang's focus is not on the relationship between Taiwan and Mainland China, her views of a general Chinese identification in Taiwan literature is unmistakable. Also, Chongtian Huang 黃重添, Mingxuan Zhuang 莊明萱, Fengling Que 闕豐齡, in their book, *Taiwan xin wenxue gaiguan* 台灣新文學概觀 [An Overview of New Taiwan Literature], 2 vols. (Xiamen: Lujiang chubanshe, 1991), they start the discussion of contemporary Taiwan literature by situating Taiwan as part of Mainland China. "Taiwan is an inseparable part of China. To understand more about Taiwan, to know it properly, is the eager wish of the whole of China. (Editor's note)" This is supposed to be a representative view of people in the Mainland. On the other hand, the writers seem to understand the views of the Taiwan residents as well. "The reality of the inseparable closeness between Taiwan and Mainland China the Mother country has already been well recognized widely by comrades in Taiwan (2)." I Yang 楊義 in *Ershi shiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo yu wenhua* 二十世紀中國小說與文化 [Twentieth Century Chinese Novel and Culture] (Taibei: Ye qiang chubanshe, 1993), writes: "More than one thousand years of nurturing from the Chinese Nation makes Taiwan, whether in its race or culture, an inseparable branch of race and culture in the National Chinese motherland. (235)" The geographical and historical bond throughout history seems to be self-evident reasons to situate Taiwan and Mainland in relation to each other.

[11] Ruijin Peng 彭瑞金, *Taiwan wenxue tansuo* 台灣文學探索 [Exploring Taiwan Literature] (Taibei shi: Qianwei chubanshe, 1995).

Netherlands ruled, or during the Ming Dynasty.[12]

Peng is not denying the geographical or historical connection Taiwan has with the Mainland, but the affirmation of these links does not lead logically to a conclusion that the literature produced on the land of Taiwan will be by association considered as a branch of the Chinese literature in the same realm as that in the Mainland. His criterion for defining a literature, however, is different from people who embrace the Motherland theory. He continues:

> Anti-local critics obviously call literary works produced from this geographical unit called Taiwan, Taiwan literature. This totally automatic ideology, lacking in self-awareness, will never produce Taiwan literature. There is one thing right about the anti-local critics, that is, the goal of advocating Taiwan localisation is to construct a Taiwan National Literature.[13]

What he means when he refers to Taiwan literature is a literature born from the self-awareness of the people on the island. Taiwan literature is a literature of the people who are consciously engaged in the problem of self-construction and definition.

Peng's support for this view is indicative of his concern for a firm sense of self. He further explains that, although Taiwan as a piece of land has existed geographically for thousands of years, only the last four hundred years of its history are being emphasised, because external powers have caused political problems, which arouse people's sense of belonging. In the last seventy years of Taiwan history, because of the betrayal by the Qing government, and the oppression of the Japanese, a powerful force of self-awareness has emerged among Taiwan people. He thinks the motherland consciousness of modern Taiwan does not come from any one source, but from the oppression exerted by many foreign powers. Pressure from outside is transformed into a stabilising force to create a new nation of people

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[12] Ibid., 60-61.

[13] Ibid., 61.

whose sense of belonging is generated from resistance to the outside world.

Taiwan literature, therefore, has a strong element of resistance. Peng sums up this concept of the birth of Taiwan literature as: "Without pressure from outside and the ambition to manipulate [Taiwan], there will be no Taiwan National self-awareness and integrity."[14] Apart from being a locus of national resistance, Taiwan literature is also responsive, always undergoing changes in ideology and attitude according to the change in outside forces with which it is interacting. As will be seen in the following outline of the literary trends in the decades since liberation, the changes in general literary expression have always been a combination of the individual writer's personal choice and the stimulation offered by the interaction between Taiwan and the international political climate. Compared to Hong Kong, literary changes in Taiwan are much more sensitive to international pressure; Hong Kong, however, is a highly self-centred city which focuses on its internal changes more than its interaction with the international scene as far as politics are concerned.

The difference in the approach of many of the writers in Taiwan and Hong Kong is very interesting. Although both Hong Kong and Taiwan are geographically detached from the Mainland, and both have been colonised, the subject matter occupying the subconscious and conscious attention of some of the contemporary writers is quite different. This, apart from the individual problem of Taiwan's political legitimacy, may also be due to the fact that Chinese immigrants to Taiwan use the same language as the National language[15] of Mainland China. Taiwan Chinese, sharing a similar language with Mainland Chinese, has a much

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[14] Ibid.

[15] National Language, *guo yu* 國語, or Putonghua, in Chinese, or Mandarin. Taiwan's official language is a variation of the Putonghua Mainland is using as its official language, differing mainly on the tone and certain vocabulary usage. But the two languages are much more similar than

closer and more complicated connection with the Mainland despite the political separation.

This separation from the Mainland, compared to the hundred and fifty years of British colonial rule over Hong Kong, together with the pressure exerted on Taiwan to own a Chinese identity, may be the strongest reason why there is a difference in the writers' concerns in these two Chinese communities, even now that Hong Kong has been officially handed over to the Mainland and Taiwan has been developed into a successful society of commerce and finance. The following will be an exploration of selected texts written by modern contemporary female writers in Taiwan, aiming to construct a continuous picture of how female writers in the last thirty years reflect on representations of femininity in relation to one's mother. As with the texts examined in contemporary Hong Kong female writers, the term "mother" relates not only to the concept of physical motherhood, but is very often posed at the symbolic level of the Mainland as the motherland of Taiwan.

The texts chosen here represent a certain line of response to the Mainland from a cumulation of four hundred years of colonial history. As with Hong Kong, the shifts in Taiwan's political identity give an extra dimension to the interpretation of its literature. In an overview of New Taiwan Literature, the authors of *Taiwan xin wenxue gaiguan* write:

> In the last three hundred years, Taiwan has been colonized several times, humiliated and attacked by Colonialism. In the sixty years between 1604 and 1662, it was colonised by Spain and Holland respectively. From 1895 when the Qing government signed the Treaty of Ma Guan, up to 1945 it was a Japanese colony. Even after the 1960s when Taiwan experiences a period of high-flying economic boom, it has still not been rid of the control by Western Capitalism. Therefore, to spread Nationalism, to uphold the dignity of its race and to fight for people's independence have always been the goals of Taiwan people's struggle.[16]

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Putonghua and Cantonese, the most common dialect in Hong Kong.

[16] Chongtian Huang 黃重添, Mingxuan Zhuang 莊明萱, Fengling Que 闕豐齡, *Taiwan xin wenxue*

The above outline is not only a description of what Taiwan has undergone in the years of its colonial history, but is an opinion of the Taiwan experience written from a particular perspective.[17] The influence exerted by the Capitalist countries of the West is attacked as ideology aiming at destroying nationalistic feelings Taiwan people are supposed to harbour because of their cultural origin, and as a result, the general trend of Taiwan literary struggle is perceived by these writers as a struggle for independence from the West, to establish its own cultural identity.

The ideological meaning of this very simple introduction to some of Taiwan's literary trends is indicative of the major complexities one is dealing with when analysing some of the contemporary writing in Taiwan. Having been under the political and cultural pressure of other countries, the natural response of the people might be a desire to move away from these bonds and restrictions. But one may ask what Nationalism is, what "dignity of the race" is referring to, and finally what the content of that "freedom" means. Are these concepts meaningful within the Mainland-Taiwan mother and daughter bond, or are they meant to be understood, as solely relevant to Taiwan as an independent state only? One may expect to find answers adhering to either view according to the origin of the publication, because obviously that is a political perspective invested with the ideology of a whole nation.

The four writers whose works are discussed in this chapter represent aspects of what may be called modern Taiwan female writing. It should be noticed that no concrete definition of the qualifier "Taiwan" has been attempted in this discussion

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*gaiguan* 台灣新文學概觀 [An Overview of New Taiwan Literature], 2 vols. (Xiamen: Lujiang chubanshe, 1991), 6.

[17] The book is published in Xiamen, a Special Administration Region of China, just like Hong Kong. The place of its publication is related to the views expressed about a sensitive issue like national identity. It is therefore important not to see literary history as objective history, but to take the writer's background into consideration as well, just as manifested in the case of Hong Kong.

because the comparative approach this thesis assumes is exactly to get away from the boundaries of a national literature. The relationship between Taiwan and the Mainland, which is still being negotiated currently by people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, plays a role as one of the most important facilitations of the form and genre of writing one can find in Taiwan, but no more. A clear-cut and politically significant vision of their relationship is certainly not within the scope of the present literary discussion. The way the two Chinese communities are connected to each other, however, directly and indirectly shapes the outlook of many of the texts produced in Taiwan these fifty years.

With an awareness of the tension between two views on Taiwan's position, an extra dimension in the interpretation of the texts by some Taiwan writers can be perceived. In the following, the analysis of the narratives is related to metanarrative associations. It is hoped that through the close reading of these selected female writers, a more or less coherent line of response can be identified about the way contemporary Taiwan women writers represent themselves and understand themselves in relation to the influence of their real and metaphorical mothers.

Taiwan Modernism is usually referred to as a slow reaction instigated by the 1919 May Fourth Movement in Mainland China.[18] This nation wide movement to raise self-awareness and hopes of reform had not fulfilled the original aspirations,

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[18] The May Fourth Movement started in China not as a literary movement but a political action supported by the nationalist awareness of the people. The Beijing students used the slogan "Fight for sovereignty from outside, and rid national traitors from within" as banner, and attempted a large scale political action to arouse general public's awareness to the need of strengthening their government. In literature, the concept of renewal and self-strengthening which is the basis of this political movement takes the form of a Westernisation in styles and contents of writing. It is because the West, with the advancement in technology and government systems, has become a symbol of freedom and independence, that the literary figures seek to borrow Western styles of writing as a step towards liberation of the Chinese mentality.

but it remains a landmark in the history of reformation in China. This early attempt at renewing literary writing has indirect links with the Modernist movement forty years later in Taiwan. According to the writers of *Taiwan xin wenxue gaiguan*, Taiwan Modernism in the 1960s was the result of three major factors.[19] Historically, Modernism in Taiwan is an offshoot from the new poetry on the Mainland in the 1930s, resulting in the new poetry in 1950s, and extending to fiction in the 1960s.

The Nationalist government's retreat to Taiwan after 1949 made its own literary scene silent about Mainland China because its own identity was ambiguous. The result was a turning to Westernisation in style and content of writing. The Taiwan government responded by promoting "zhandou wenxue" 戰鬪文學 [Battling Literature] to reform the literary scene, but ended up in a flood of rather monotonous anti-Communist literature. Dissatisfaction with the current situation pushed some serious writers to look for alternatives. With the link to China being closed, they had to choose Westernisation over continuation of tradition, and so Westernisation becomes the way to reform the literature in the 1960s. Together with the special situation of Taiwan, the sentiment of isolation inherent in the Modernist movement from the West has a special appeal to the alienation mentality of Taiwan at the time and helps push the influence of Westernisation.

Ouyang Tzu,[20] as one of the reputed Modernist writers, also embodies certain

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[19] Chongtian Huang 黃重添, Mingxuan Zhuang 莊明萱, Fengling Que 闕豐齡, *Taiwan xin wenxue gaiguan* 台灣新文學概觀 [An Overview of New Taiwan Literature], 2 vols. (Xiamen: Lujiang chubanshe, 1991), 105-07.

[20] Tzu Ouyang 歐陽子, originally named Zhuhui Hong 洪智惠, born on fifth of April 1939, in Hiroshima, Japan. Her father was a student in Japan during the occupation. When Japan surrendered in 1945, her family came back to Taiwan. Her childhood was spent in Japan, but she had said before that she had no childhood because then Japan was invading China. In 1962 she went to study in America, emigrated with her husband to Texas in 1965, stopped fiction writing since

characteristic features of Westernised writing in the 1960s. She is not afraid of breaking away from conventions and taboos surrounding the exploration of unusual psychological states. Her short story, "The Net,"[21] though written a few years earlier than Nieh Hualing[22] did *Mulberry and Peach*,[23] is used as a starting point for this journey through contemporary Taiwan female writing because her Modernist background is a good indication of the mentality a group of Taiwan people developed in the last few decades. Bai Xianyong describes her as "a solid psychological realist, she breaks through cultural and social taboos and exposes the real truth of human unconsciousness."[24]

Writing in an age when the women of Taiwan society were still very much bounded by social conventions and expectations, but simultaneously conscious of other alternatives open to them with better education, Ouyang Tzu portrays the tragic awareness of an unfulfilled self in "The Net." Instead of the all embracing, powerful and mature mother, she creates a young woman who can hardly take care of herself in the face of oppression imposed by her husband. Motherhood is not only no help to the realisation of her personality, but is actually a burden because it puts her in a position of bondage. Although "The Net" is only one of many stories Ouyang Tzu has written, the scenario portrayed as well as the psychological tension

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1969 because eye disease had blinded her left eye.

[21] Tzu Ouyang, "The Net," translated by the author, *An Anthology of Taiwan Fiction Since 1926*, ed. Joseph S. M. Lau (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 185-94.

[22] Hualing Nieh, Taiwan-American writer. 1926 born in Yichang in the Mainland. 1948 when graduated from Chinese University, emigrated to Taiwan. 1964 left for America, married to an American poet. In her books it is common to see the experiences of overseas Chinese thinking of their lives as those of exiles.

[23] Hualing Nieh, *Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China*, trans. Jane Parish Yang and Linda Lappin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981).

[24] Bai Xianyong 白先勇, *Mo ran huishou* 驀然回首 [Looking Back] (Hong Kong: Wenhua she, 1978), 31.

experienced by the young protagonist is illuminating as a possibility of what contemporary Taiwan life embodies.

Motherhood is not a total failure yet. Nieh Hualing in *Mulberry and Peach* portrays the double life of a Chinese woman who is actively engaged in the journey of realising herself. In this first person narrative, two voices often make contradictory decisions about their shared life, simply because each voice possesses a different personality. Peach says that Mulberry chooses to keep the baby inside herself because she wants to redeem her guilt, while she takes every chance to abort the then very inconvenient baby. Motherhood, then, can also be an active choice made by a person to do something for her own self. Viewed this way, this book which is written only four years later than Ouyang Tzu's "The Net," shows another vision of one's relationship with one's mother.

The biggest irony of *Mulberry and Peach* is that the two names belong to the same physical body with a schizophrenic mentality. The woman who possesses both names can hardly be called independent because she herself is divided and each part of her self can never be independent of the other. The body is already the biggest burden to itself. Her experience, thus, of wandering from place to place, and from mental space to mental space, is an illustration of the psychological and physical difficulties of someone who has no sense of belonging to any place, or any origin. Mulberry, whose mother is dead, is in constant struggle for a sense of stability and this struggle can well be an artistic manifestation of a similar sense of helplessness in a cultural unconscious.

While Nieh Hualing's tale of schizophrenic wandering draws a picture of

Taiwan wanderers overseas, "The Butcher's Wife,"[25] once a scandalous novel by Li Ang,[26] puts the site of struggle back into the native land of Taiwan. The novel is one of a series she wrote about Lucheng, her native home, and the historical background once again depicts the inherent powerful struggle between the old and the new, whether in terms of social conventions, or of more practical aspects like the human need for life sustenance. The setting of "The Butcher's Wife" condenses the various forces shaping a person's life and facilitates their interaction with each other, ending in a cross-generational battle between an individual who has no direction at all as to her orientation and the pre-determined influence which tries to make something of her. In this case, the mother is a shadow over the possibility for a self to break free.

"The Butcher's Wife" may be seen as a landmark of literary writing in the 1970s, with the psychosexual dimension coming to the surface. In fact, the 1970s in Taiwan literature is an important transitional period, when the Nativist literary trend gradually gives way to Modernist-Westernised writing of the generation of economic boom. A new group of writers, among whom Li Ang is one, begins to dominate the literary scene with their new writing and energetic exploration of the human psychology in relation to the explicit and implicit forces at work in society.[27] By the 1980s, the literary climate of Taiwan has been more or less stable with the

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[25] Ang Li, *The Butcher's Wife*, trans. Howard Goldblatt and Ellen Yeung (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (Hong Kong) Co. Ltd., 1990.

[26] Ang Li 李昂, born in 1952 in Lucheng. Her real name is Shi Shuduan 施淑端, one of a family of writers, her sister is Shi Shuqing 施叔青, who has written a Hong Kong trilogy, mentioned in the previous chapter. Li Ang graduated from Taiwan with a philosophy degree, then pursued her studies in the USA, writing at the same time. Her work specialises in the struggle between the male and female sexualities, and thus she has been regarded as a pioneer in this genre in contemporary Taiwan.

[27] I Yang 楊義, *Ershi shiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo yu wenhua* 二十世紀中國小說與文化 [Twentieth Century Chinese Novel and Culture] (Taibei shi: Ye qiang chubanshe, 1993).

continual emergence of new writers in different genres, all under the strong influence of a hyper-commercial and materialistic society.

The 1990s then emerge with writing which in a way is a natural continuation of what has happened before, but in other ways can be interpreted as a new landmark. The last text to be discussed in this chapter, "Shijimo de huali"[28] by Zhu Tianwen,[29] in my view, breaks new ground in the representation of a woman realising herself in relation to her environment. It can be a continuation of the legacy of the past decades because the social background is approximately the same, only the economic and cultural development has gained speed and is moving at a rate the human mind and consciousness find hard to respond to properly. In a society with such speed, the past, the older culture moves farther and farther away and links with it become difficult to grasp. The mother, once an upholder and a solid link to one's origin, fades from the scene.

That is the kind of world depicted in "Shijimo de huali." The narrator is not the first person protagonist, but the presence of the protagonist is very much felt because the entire story is a record of her sensual experience. Other characters also feature in the story, but the movement, the action, the vision and every encounter in the story is recorded as part of the protagonist Mia's senses. The mother is nowhere to be found, and she is not even missed, the fictional world containing only

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[28] Tianwen Zhu 朱天文, "Shijimo de huali" 世紀末的華麗 [Fin-de-siècle Grandeur], *Shijimo de huali* 世紀末的華麗 [Fin-de-siècle Grandeur] (Hong Kong: Yuan liu chubanshe, 1991).

[29] She comes from a family of scholars and writers. Her father, Xiling Zhu, is a traditional scholar and has written studies of literature. Zhu herself is one of three sisters who are all writers, and she has been very much under the influence of Eileen Chang. Therefore Zhu's style shows her traditional Chinese learning as well as the influence of Western literature which she studies. Zhu has a particular attachment to the texture of words and when she was writing her *Huangren shouji* 荒人手記 [The Diary of a Desolate Man] (Taibei shi: Shibao wenhua chuban qiye youxian gongsi, 1994). She wrote in the preface that writing her novel is an engagement of "alchemy of words" (文字煉金術), which can be seen as an indication of her focus on the language itself.

Mia and her sensual experience. Things expected to be provided by the maternal figure are replaced by something else and the lack is not mentioned. Finally the mother is displaced, put away as a thing of the past and no longer required in the hyper-consumerist society represented in "Shijimo de huali."

Now we start looking at the development of the mother figure from an early modernist, Ouyang Tzu. In "The Net," the reliability of the mother figure is being challenged for she is shown to be incapable even of knowing herself. Yü is a young wife married to a successful and vibrant businessman, leading a comfortable bourgeois life. One day she meets one of her college friends she used to be really close to, but has been "separated" from by her marriage. This encounter with an old-time friend suddenly puts her life in a new light. When she hears him call her name in the street,

> she halted in the middle of a step. A look of surprise flitted across her face. Yet she did not turn around at once. For a few seconds she stood completely still, not moving a muscle. Then suddenly she flushed.[30]

Although it was only a chance encounter in the street, the degree of surprise and her response to it are very illuminating. The muscle that she did not let move and the slow turning she made, are clear enough indications of the actual and conceptual distance between herself now as a bourgeois wife and the "self" aroused by the calling of her own name. When she finally turns round and sees the caller of her name, "[joy] appeared on her face" and "[she] literally beamed."[31] This encounter with her past is not only a surprise, but a most pleasant surprise too.

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[30] Tzu Ouyang, "The Net," translated by the author, *An Anthology of Taiwan Fiction Since 1926*, ed. Joseph S. M. Lau (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 186.

[31] Ibid.

Further into the story, it is revealed that the two of them were not only friends in their college years, but there was also an ambiguous emotional attachment between them. After the initial joy and tenderness, Yü is then conscious of the fact she is holding a baby-bottle and she hurriedly hides it behind her back. This minor gesture reveals something in her unconscious, something that she herself might not be fully aware of. Getting married and having a baby are stages of people's life, but Yü unconsciously does not want T'ang to be aware of her circumstances, because of the ambiguous quasi-amorous attachment they had for each other in the past:

> Things had remained the same between her and T'ang P'ei-chih. The bond was still there, tying them together. And then, in spite of themselves, they still couldn't help hurting each other because both of them were so highly sensitive and understanding.[32]

It is ironic that while the bond between these two similar personalities is still there, they are hurting each other. The connection which has such potential is in fact a destructive force undermining their individualities:

> Wen-chin had often imagined what it would be like if instead of Ting Shih-chung she had married T'ang P'ei-chih. She did not think it would have worked, because they knew each other too well and they had too much in common. Strange though it might sound, they were simply too close to be able to live together as husband and wife.[33]

If friends as close to each other as Yü and T'ang are cannot work out in marriage, then one wonders what kind of relationship is supposed to be right between husband and wife. The way Yü describes her marriage is revealing:

> He had really made her happy by taking her for granted, and by willingly accepting all her sacrifices. She felt secure with him, and was sure of herself as

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[32] Ibid., 188.

[33] Ibid.

> long as she could cling to him. Since their marriage two years ago, she had given herself up to him, offering him everything - her body, her mind, her will.[34]

This certainly conveys much more complicated sentiments than these four lines of words appear to say. Yü is "happy", "secure" and "sure of herself" with her husband, and this seems to be the best anyone can expect from a marriage. Yet side by side with these feelings, there is something hidden which is a cause for worry. The happiness and security Yü feels is bought at the expense of her individuality and selfhood, because she has given up everything about herself. This marriage is actually a transaction in which she gives everything in return for a sense of security because she clings to the man she calls her husband.

The explanation of her seemingly inexplicable choice of her marriage partner lies very much in the word "security." Doubtful as it seems, Yü may actually feel sincerely happy in her marriage to Ting, who provides her with security and makes her sure of herself. But one must wonder what the content of that happiness is. She is secure because Ting offers her a financially comfortable life, moreover a clearly-defined role for a typical middle-class wife, who makes all sorts of sacrifices to her husband and is taken for granted. Her happiness, therefore, is very similar to the kind of happiness Nora experiences in *A Doll's House*[35] before her realisation of herself. Both Yü and Nora are happy because they only have to act according to orders in a prescribed role to get approval.

Then her own name is called in the street by a former college friend. The encounter with T'ang is symbolically significant to her as well as structurally

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House and Other Plays*, trans. Peter Watts (London: Penguin, 1965), 145-231.

important in the layout of the story. It can be seen from Yü's thoughts in hindsight:

> For two years she did not seem to have really existed. She had not been living her own life, because Ting Shih-chung, ever full of energy and eager to protect her, would consider and arrange everything for her.
>
> But now, after two years' hibernation, her will was suddenly stirring, awakening.[36]

At the point when these thoughts emerge, Yü has already crossed over from the oblivion of security to a painful realisation of her inertia, and that is why she calls that hibernation. To her personally, the re-appearance of T'ang, someone so similar to herself in sensitivity and so close to her, is an acute reminder of her self which has been forced to hibernate for two years in the comfortable and secure home owned by Ting. T'ang calls her name and hails her subjectivity into existence again.

Structurally the appearance of T'ang introduces the possibility of change in both the story and Yü's life. The patriarchal family unit built by Ting has not been challenged, and would have remained unchallenged if T'ang had not sent a letter to Yü announcing his visit. His letter sparks off a series of reaction from both Yü and Ting because T'ang is the destabilising force from the past. To safeguard his marriage and domination over his wife, Ting intercepts the letter and writes a reply in Yü's name, presenting a picture of a blissful marriage between them, to ward off T'ang's possible intrusion. When the incident is revealed by the appearance of

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[36] Tzu Ouyang, "The Net," translated by the author, *An Anthology of Taiwan Fiction Since 1926*, ed. Joseph S. M. Lau (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 189.

T'ang, Ting is even proud to admit to Yü his thorough understanding of her to be able to speak for her.[37]

Shih-chung just takes charge of her life without her knowing and consent. The significance of the act can be perceived when one imagines the difference if Shih-chung had replied in his own name. That may not make the act more acceptable, but in that case he would have been speaking for himself alone, and not violating her integrity by taking her voice. One can see how indoctrinated Yü has been, so that she even lets her husband usurp her self in the two years of their marriage, and not rebel. In signing her name, Ting is saying that he can "become" her any time he wants to, and manipulate any other relationship she could have with other people without her own decision. The act pains T'ang, not because he has no hopes of resuming their former love, but because Yü has fallen into the exact net he has so painstakingly avoided for her. Ting's writing of a letter in her name had symbolically killed her because he had left her no voice and no self to live for. The details included by Ting in the letter about her happy married life might or might not be true, but it was not Yü's decision to let T'ang know under the circumstances; Ting has said for her what he wants her to say. Yü, like Nora, is the doll in a comfortable Doll's House.

The incident of the letter, when revealed, throws Yü into a dilemma about her life and herself. She suddenly realises that she thinks in a different way from her husband and is on the point of querying what she has always believed and what he has always wanted her to believe: that she is happy to live for him only and be a subordinate to him. In her moment of reflection, her husband employs one of the

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[37] Ibid., 191.

most primitive but effective weapons to stop her from thinking by reminding her of her so-called duty:

> Shih-chung was smiling at her. He had on his face the kind of tender look that she knew only too well. He rose from the armchair and came to sit down with her. He put his arm around her, squeezed her, and started to kiss her.[38]

At this point of crisis in their marriage, sex, which is always seen as an accompaniment to love, is called to action. Here it serves the dual purpose of pacifying the female and reminding her of her status. Shih-chung's embrace and kisses have the double function of fooling her with acts of love and reminding her of her obligation to do whatever he wants her to.

The effectiveness of this "method" is highly problematic, however. It is exactly because of the pre-existence of an inequality between the status of men and women that the sexual act could be seen as a favour the husband grants to the wife as a sign of love and protection. Although extra-marital relationships for women are not to be tolerated in the largely monogamous Chinese societies, those of men are always considered a symbol of their sexual potency. It is because of this double standard that a husband's "attention" to a wife is regarded as a blessing[39] and extraordinary, while a wife's devotion is simply taken for granted. On top of this, the sense of "duty" aroused by this act of intimacy is also question-begging. A woman married to a man is often considered his "possession" and thus naturally exploited for his benefit, but not the other way round. In incidents like this, when the wife shows signs of querying the absolute power he has over her, the husband

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[38] Ibid., 192.

[39] In Imperial China, Emperors had harems inhabited by thousands of concubines, thus the saying "three thousand beauties in the harem" 後宮佳麗三千. The Chinese term used to refer to his visiting them at night and having sex with them is "chongxing" 寵幸, "chong" is to love, to pamper, or to show favour; "xing" is luck, a blessing. So the act of the Emperor choosing to spend the night with a concubine is regarded as a special favour or a blessing to these women. From this, one can

only needs to demand sexual satisfaction to silence her because both parties have already internalised these social roles and values. Therefore, when Ting continues with his sexual pursuit and Yü shows signs of real resistance, he "was taken aback. He loosened his grasp, let go of her, and looked at her in amazement."[40]

Thus starts the confrontation which could be the beginning of her liberation from this trap. On one side is the husband, sure of his power, and convinced of her duty and submission, trying to make her see her "duty"; on the other is the protected wife who has just been struck by the possibility of a different life controlled by her own will. Reading this confrontation is like watching the social forces and pressure of tradition burst out with the newly awakened sense of individuality on the woman's part. At this point, "[a] look of annoyance came over his face. Suddenly he was cold toward her."[41] The husband pretends to abide by what she says, but the price for this action is his coldness toward her, a withdrawal of the "love" that she takes as the sole reason for their relationship. It is at this point when he seemed to succumb that he was the most dangerous. As soon as he put on his cold face, her initial doubt and self-awareness backed down.

In the Taiwan society of the 1970s, when "The Net" was written, women were still very much regarded as the possession of the husband. Even into the 1990s, the wife's status in the family is not much better, as is seen in the results of a report prepared by a Taiwan feminist group in 1995 about women's situation in the Taiwan society in 1995.[42] From the legal, social, cultural and economic conditions

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see the power imbalance between the two sexes which somehow is still retained in the unconscious.

[40] Tzu Ouyang, "The Net," translated by the author, *An Anthology of Taiwan Fiction Since 1926*, ed. Joseph S. M. Lau (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 193.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Nuxingxue xuehui 女性學學會, *Taiwan funu chujing baipishu: 1995* 台灣婦女處境白皮書:

surrounding the female population in Taiwan in 1995, the report shows an improving but still exploited female social position in the patriarchal society. But the improvement is only general, the highest positions in corporations and academic institutes are still held in the majority by men. Legally, although there was a major legal battle concerning the rights and duties of the wife in the family, she is still not granted an exactly equal status with the husband in the family, for example, concerning the rights over the children.[43]

Yü, a wife in the 1970s, does not enjoy the same chance to fight for her rights, and obviously she is not even fully aware of this right to demand, judging from her responses to her husband's outbreak. She clings to her functional value, as a wife, because she does not see herself in any other position. This need to maintain the only possible status develops in her a psychological inertia which prevents her from actively engaging in a struggle for her own self-emergence. The misconception can be seen in the language she uses in describing the situation:

> Don't forsake me. I was just testing myself. To find out if I could live without you. No, I can't. I can't live without you. I knew it all along. So please don't leave me, please. There is no me, but you and me. I am nothing, I do not exist -[44]

Instead of seeing it as a chance for a voice of her own, she perceives it as an initiative taken up by her husband to get rid of her. She willingly submits herself to the object-position and begs for a continuation of the link with her husband, even at the price of admitting disappearance.

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1995 年 [White Paper on the Situation of Taiwan Women: 1995] (Taibei shi: Shibao wenhua cheban qiye youxian gongsi, 1995).

[43] Ibid., 68-70.

[44] Tzu Ouyang, "The Net," translated by the author, *An Anthology of Taiwan Fiction Since 1926*, ed. Joseph S. M. Lau (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 194.

Therefore, at the end of the story when the omniscient narrator writes "[but] she had told him the truth. She was truly happy,"[45] the tone of the story is a pessimistic rather than a hopeful one as the words sound. The happiness Yü feels truthfully here is not something to be celebrated if one considers the well-being of her individual self. For what she has achieved at the end of the story after the encounter with old college friend and the row with her husband, is nothing but a maintenance of her status quo, which may be considered as being even worse than before, because this time she willingly gives up her chance to strive for independence and surrenders herself. Her surrender, and her claim of happiness at the end of the story, is important because together they represent an individual failure in Taiwan in the 1970s concerning issues of female identification.

On a deeper level, and perhaps more influential, is the link between the symbolic elements of the story and a wider awareness of the Taiwan people to their relationship with the Mainland. Yü, the mother in "The Net," is constructing a question concerning motherhood and its status in relation to an individual's awareness of herself. Not only is Yü shown to be incapable of providing care and direction for another, she herself is at a loss as to who she is and what she wants. Her biological motherhood may not be contested, but her ability to fulfil her role is questionable, so much so that at the end of the story, when she renounces her right to her individuality, one's confidence in this mother is also gone. Taken to a larger framework outside the immediate story, it can pose as a query of the mother-daughter link between the Mainland and Taiwan, for Taiwan literature in the five decades since the retreat has been intensely engaged in an inward meditation on this problem of belonging.

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[45] Ibid.

The journey from "The Net" to *Mulberry and Peach* is not just the four years between their dates of publication, but a gap created by physical and mental distance. *Mulberry and Peach* is a fragmented story about a woman who has run from place to place, bringing with her memories from different parts of her life, but frustrated by reality so that she has no idea how to manage herself and her memory. The fragmented presentation of the novel is an indication of her fragmented consciousness both of herself and her society. While Ouyang Tzu's story presents a woman who loses herself in a conventional marriage in a specific moment of the 1970s Taiwan society, the heroine in *Mulberry and Peach* loses herself through the constant need to run away from reality because there is no place for her to stay. The two names, Mulberry and Peach, both belong to the same woman, but ironically the two names carry contrastive qualities at the two ends of the colour prism, and the woman is in the same state of tension.

"I'm not Mulberry. Mulberry is dead!"[46] The opening of the novel is a negation, an annihilation, a non-existence. Instead of introducing who the protagonist is, the first sentence only tells the reader who the protagonist is not. Moreover, when the owner of this voice is asked about her name, she replies:

> Call me anything you like. Ah-chu, Ah-ch'ou, Mei-chuan, Ch'un-hsiang, Ch'iu-hsia, Tung-mei, Hsiu-ying, Ts'ui-fang, Niu-niu, Pao-pao, Pei-pei, Lien-ying, Kuen-fen, Chü-wa. Just call me Peach, OK?[47]

The ultimate name given does not seem to carry any meaning, for it is the end of a list of random items, just an arbitrary end to a sample given offhand. The final decision she draws upon seems to relate to the first name only in its negation, Peach

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[46] Hualing Nieh, *Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China*, translated by Jane Parish Yang and Linda Lappin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981), x.

[47] Ibid., 3.

as in contrast to Mulberry. This act of self-naming, however, sets the tone for the entire novel both because of the symbolic importance of one's name to oneself, as well as the respect Chinese people grant to the person who performs this duty.

At the moment when the narrative begins, the protagonist decides her name should be Peach, not because she likes the name, but because she has to supply information about herself to her visitor, an Immigration Department official who is checking on her application for permanent residence in the United States. This beginning of the novel is full of underlying elements for interpretation. The protagonist is applying for permanent residence because this is not her home, and because for various reasons she cannot stay wherever she last was. In other words, she is still looking for a home because she does not belong anywhere, not to the place where she was born, nor to the various places where she stayed and was married. At this point of the narrative when she is questioned about her personal details, she has to invent her life because she has no ties with her past, to the extent that even her name has to be reinvented.

Peach, by taking up the position of the name-giver and the named, symbolically takes herself away from belonging to any community and grants herself an isolated status by getting a new name. In a way, she is giving herself a new birth in a new land and planning to start a new life, and the story at the beginning seems like a story of a woman who has taken her life into her own hands and desires to start afresh from day one. It seems impossible though, to stop one's history at a point in life and simply have a clean break to start anew. Changing the place of habitation, one's appearance, name, and one's social circle does not necessarily bring about a discontinuation from what has happened before, because time is a continuation. No one can exist outside time, except perhaps for death. Therefore, Mulberry, or

Peach, as she prefers to call herself at the beginning of the story, has got herself engaged in a doomed attempt from the very beginning, and the proceedings of the narrative is a record of this attempt to escape.

The idea of escape from one's home, one's past and even from oneself is not only the content of this narrative, but is also one of the major issues occupying the minds of a lot of Taiwanese writers, judging from the amount of fictional and non-fictional work dealing with the question of Taiwan's orientation in Chinese culture. Nieh Hualing's novel deals with this question from the perspective of someone who has been wandering from one place to another, obviously related to Nieh's own personal experiences, as she was born in Mainland China, grew up in Taiwan, and then pursued her writing career in the States. Her personal encounter with these different locations gives her additional positions of observation which add another dimension to the meditation of one's sense of belonging, especially regarding Taiwan's complicated connection with the Mainland and the United States.

The cultural origin shared by Taiwan and China has already been explained at the beginning of this chapter, the special link between Taiwan and the U. S. may be interesting to look at. After Japan surrendered in the Second World War, the status of Taiwan as a Japanese colony ended, and she was free again. Being an exploited state and isolated from the Mainland regime, Taiwan sought to strengthen herself by importing advanced technological developments from the West, and at the same time sent students and young scholars overseas to acquire the necessary skills to build a strong economy back home. Going overseas, especially to the U. S.,

became such a popular outlet for young people that a lot of narratives are written about it.[48]

Due to the scale of this outward movement, another layer of complication is added to the meaning of belonging to Taiwan. Distance from Taiwan seems to introduce a critical dimension to the sentiment one feels for the island. In fact, the United States' reputation of being the cultural melting pot is ironical because in the first place it is not equally possible for every new immigrant to merge into the so-called American culture, for the difference in people's ethnic origin is still an obstacle to a true assimilation. The second thing is, when new elements merge into the so-called melting pot, the nature of the American culture will change at the same time, so the content of American culture is not fixed either.

That is why *Mulberry and Peach* is a useful text in this exploration of a mother-daughter relationship concerning the intricate bond between Taiwan and the Mainland. The one protagonist, Mulberry and Peach, wanders from China to Taiwan, and then to the United States, changing from place to place. The beginning of her journey away from home is interesting. Most of the anecdotes about her biological mother are negative. Her mother is represented as someone

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[48] Going to the States as an opportunity to further one's studies or pursuing a career has been a great trend, the extent of which can perhaps be seen in some of the literature written by Taiwan writers at the time. Juan Huang 黃娟 is known for writing overseas Chinese experiences in the States, being one of the group herself. Her novels like *Ai Sha Gang de nuhai* 愛莎岡的女孩 [The Girl who Likes Sagan] (Taibei shi: Qianwei chubanshe, 1996), *Bian de nuren* 彼岸的女人 [The Woman on the Other Side] (Taibei shi: Qianwei chubanshe, 1996) form a series of the Chinese experience in the States. Lihua Yu 於梨華 is another Taiwan writer who has emigrated to the States and engaged in writing similar Chinese experience overseas. Her book, *Youjian zonglu, youjian zonglu* 又見棕櫚, 又見棕櫚 [Again the Palm Trees] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1989) has won prizes for its representation of this semi-exile status of the Taiwan Chinese in another part of the world, far away from their homeland. Xiujuan Zhu 朱秀娟, *Bieyou qinghuai* 別有情懷 [Another Feeling] (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1996), is another example showing the various experiences of Chinese people in overseas environment. Of course individual experiences vary, but the general sentiment conveyed is one of an ironic longing for home simultaneously existing with the inability to achieve this home-coming. Protagonists of different novels are trapped each in their environment, unable to fulfil their desire for home returning because of various uncontrollable factors.

who mistreats her, so provides no sense of attachment to her family. Therefore when her friend, Lou-Shi, suggests they should go to join the forces fighting in Chongqing, she just takes with her a piece of jade amulet and goes with her.

Thus Mulberry starts the journey away from where she lives with her mother and her family to parts of China and later to other parts of the world. The journey and the record of this journey are both presented in an interesting manner. On the one hand, the narrative read by the readers of the book *Mulberry and Peach* is fragmented because the first person narrator seems to be talking about the stories of two different women, yet in the midst of the narration, Peach will take over and insert bits and pieces of information she has about Mulberry, since according to her, the officials from the Immigration Department are interested in Mulberry. Then once the diary written by Mulberry is presented, the first person narrator becomes the narrated character again. Therefore a shift of perspective and voice from one to another happens very frequently and this helps to enrich the psychological content of the text because one can see the minds of the different personalities.

Yet on top of this fragmented structure, there is a special dialogic coherence between the seemingly broken sections. Although Mulberry's diary entries are intercut with Peach's letter to the Immigration official, these texts are actually representing the mental picture of the same woman, Mulberry's diary entries representing mostly the history of the present Peach, but towards the end of the novel, the relationship between the two voices becomes more and more a competition when Mulberry also begins to enter the consciousness of the text. Here, instead of being the sole narrator of the text, Peach is addressing Mulberry as a simultaneous presence:

> Mulberry, I'm glad I'm the one who came to New York, not you. I'm having a wonderful time. I'll be certain to write down everything interesting that happens.

> If you show up by chance, you will know what's been happening. Look, I'll cooperate with you if you won't spoil all the fun.[49]

Peach is the aggressive voice who dominates the situation, but who is also aware of the presence of Mulberry. She is the one who knows what is going on and obviously feels at ease because she is in control. Her knowledge of Mulberry's presence does not undermine her authority, instead she tries to put Mulberry under her control as well.

This communication between Mulberry and Peach is interesting in several respects. First of all, Peach is talking to Mulberry through the medium of written words. She writes things down for Mulberry in case she suddenly emerges and does not know what has been going on. Although they share the same body, their minds are only connected to the extent that they know the presence of the other, not every detail of their experience. It is actually a major inconvenience because they take turns in experiencing reality, and the submerged half will have to be briefed as to what has happened. This shift from one consciousness to another is not only an element in the psychological illness of the protagonist in the story, but also a symbolic representation of the Taiwanese story.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Taiwan has gone through changes in the last four hundred years. She is like an orphan kicked from under one power to another, busily adjusting herself to the different house rules of different people. With this frequency of shifting, it is almost impossible to develop a coherent linear history which can trace the cultural legacy from the beginning to the present, especially when shifting of power involves cultural annihilation like the period of Japanese occupation from 1895 to 1945, towards the end of which there

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[49]Hualing Nieh, *Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China*, trans. Jane Parish Yang and Linda

was almost a total collapse of Taiwan's culture. The schizophrenic nature of the narrative in *Mulberry and Peach* is a symbolic representation of such a fragmented consciousness in modern Taiwanese history.

If Mulberry and Peach can be seen as the fragmented consciousness of modern Taiwan, then what can one see in their personality and their representation here? Here is Peach talking about her life in New York:

> I like to travel back and forth in the subway network. I've never taken the wrong train. I know which train goes where.[50]

She likes the certainty of knowing toward which direction she is heading, and being able to tell others what to do. These characteristics can also be seen in her relationship to Mulberry, for it is always she who is in command. Peach likes to have fun, to explore new environments and to meet different people, her letter to the Immigration Service is the framework which holds the entire narrative together, exploring the personalities of Mulberry and herself, and trying to make sense out of this representation and her experience in different places.

As for Mulberry, although she does not have as much of a chance as Peach to speak for herself, she has actually spoken a lot indirectly through the diary, photo album and the record of her own life which Peach has included in the narrative. Although Peach is the obvious narrator of the major part of the novel, Mulberry's voice is also represented. She is the conservative and frightened one and her attitude towards her unprepared baby is proof:

> *I call Dr Johnson and beg him to see me tomorrow at six. I'm willing to pay triple the cost I'm an alien with no way out I must get an abortion, he coldly says all right but don't change your mind again.*
> *I ask Teng to drive to Worchester, then drive back home. He agrees.*

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Lippin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981), 188.

[50] Ibid., 194.

*I call I-po. He is very happy, he says he's been thinking of the way I looked soaking in the tub.*[51]

Her words are jumbled and confusing, compared to the clear command of Peach. She tries to eliminate the baby because it is a responsibility she cannot take, contrary to what Peach thinks.

Mulberry and Peach are forever at cross purposes because they represent opposite outlooks on life and there is never a compromise. They are both exiles from their homeland, at least from the place where they were born, but the way they deal with this status of exile is different. While Peach enjoys a sense of certainty when directing people to different places, she is also enjoying her sporadic life from place to place, and attaching to different people, having affairs and finally trying to keep her own baby, even though it will be an illegitimate child because the father is married to another person. Peach, as her name suggests, stands for the more colourful outlook of life and feels the freedom of rootlessness. She does not need roots at all.

Mulberry obviously looks much more ill at ease from the way her part of the narrative is presented. Although the first three sections, introduced by Peach's letter to the man from the Immigration Service, consist of her own voice talking about herself, that narrative already belongs to the past. The present, the voice guiding the movement of the narrative, is in the hands of Peach. Towards the end, Mulberry is only presented as the subconscious voice which from time to time will break into Peach's sensibility and contradict things she has planned and done, but still, Mulberry is the hidden voice and is very much under the control of Peach.

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[51] Ibid., 201.

Her presence in the narrative seems to be solely for the purpose of being subdued by the ease and freedom expressed by the other part of her self.

Looking at the movement of Mulberry as recorded, it is not difficult to see the symbolic meaning of her presence and her movement. Her life starts in the Mainland, then she runs away from home, trying to go to Chongqing with her best friend to join the fighting, but is trapped on a ship with other passengers in Chü-t'ang Gorge for days. By the time they are saved, news comes that the Japanese have already surrendered, no more fighting is needed. Then the second part is her notebook written in Beijing, the besieged city during the Civil War between KMT and the Communist, she and Chia-kang decide to run away from the Mainland but are stuck with other exiles in the countryside. They have to hide their identity and relationship to each other because its revelation will be dangerous for people on the run like them. They are trapped in their foot journey.

By part three, Mulberry has already escaped to Taiwan and is still staying with Chia-kang, but in an attic in one of their friends' house. They have a girl with them but their life is totally confined to the attic because Chia-kang is wanted by the police. Time has no meaning for them already because the attic has become the only world they can move in. The stagnant state of their life is symbolised by the clock which has stopped at twelve-thirteen, and which Chia-kang has failed to repair. At the end of this section policemen again come for one of those routine house checks and it is Mulberry who identifies Shen Chia-kang, her husband, for the police because he is the wanted one. At this point Mulberry has already got rid of the burden of her life in Taiwan because she has no criminal record and it is only because of Chia-kang that she has to hide together with him.

In part four Peach has included Mulberry's notebook of her life in America, but there is one important difference. In the notebook this time, characters are given a brief description. Of Mulberry, it reads:

> MULBERRY, she is now 41. She has applied for permanent residency in the USA. Everything in her life has been destroyed: her past, her traditional values, and her ethics have been shattered. She is schizophrenic.[52]

Mulberry is ill and she is no longer in control of her consciousness although her past is not there to be her burden anymore. Of course it is a matter of perspective when considering one's past; to Mulberry who clings to the past for a sense of orientation, that is a necessary part of her healthy relationship with herself, because the past serves as the origin from which she emerges and can develop. But for Peach, the past is just something she wants to get away from, something over which she wants to have definite control. Her way of achieving this is through manipulation of Mulberry's past. She writes letters to the man from the Immigration Office with enclosed notebooks, diaries, and an album of Mulberry's to give him the information he needs about Mulberry. By forwarding these pieces about Mulberry's past to the man, Peach is both getting rid of her own past, and furthering her own wandering to another point at the same time.

From the records of Mulberry's life in different countries, one can see the highly claustrophobic environment she is being put in. She is trapped on the Gorge in the Mainland, where she loses her virginity. Then the escape to Taiwan puts her and her husband within the confines of the attic, while personally her relationship with Chia-kang suffers because of her loss of innocence in China; finally when she runs to the United States she is trapped in the schizophrenia contest with Peach and in turn is put in a helpless situation. She does not seem to have total control even

over a baby, which is her own body and her own life. Peach, another part of her, but one whom she cannot understand nor control, makes the decisions and the consequences of those will have to be borne by both of them.

Therefore, one can see a miniature Taiwanese consciousness in the experiences of Mulberry. During the Second World War, Mulberry suffers just like the others, and her offer to help in fighting ends with a six-day impasse at the Gorge, which renders her services redundant. The Motherland does not recognise her contribution. Her escape to Taiwan coincides with the retreat of the KMT government, but still she is trapped in a confined space, cut off from the external world, isolated. The move to the States is the starting point of her schizophrenia, which may also be understood as the point when a possibility is introduced. Mulberry is still trapped, but it is no longer the only possible life, Peach is attempting to gain freedom and moreover to exercise her freedom in this foreign land. Peach, and the split which permits this possibility, the schizophrenia, becomes an alternative to Mulberry's confinement to her past.

Peach's wandering may be chaotic and disturbing at times, especially when Mulberry takes charge of the situation and interferes with her decisions. The incident about the baby is a good example. Peach wants to keep it but Mulberry wants to get rid of the baby, this sign of a continuation of her life. Mulberry cannot afford to have the next generation yet, because she is still too trapped in her past, in her endless wandering. She is desperately trying to root herself to a place but her past does not provide a good opportunity or preparation for her to do so. That is why, for her, the exile is an exile from a motherland which has expelled her,

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[52] Ibid., 160.

rendering her homeless. For Peach, however, a split personality from the wandering Mulberry, the exile means another alternative, a potentially positive one.

When Peach meets the Jew in the water tower and they introduce themselves, she describes herself as "an Asian Jew."[53] To a certain extent she is comparable to a Jew because she has lost her country, and is in transit trying to get a right of residence somewhere. The interesting thing about Peach, however, is that her behaviour seems to turn her state of a wanderer into an aggressive pursuit of her own desires. To some, her indulgence in relationships with men and her hedonism may be the signs of a chaotic life, but at a different level, they can be regarded as evidence of her life energy. It may be no accident that after introducing herself as a Jew from Asia, thereby confirming her rootlessness, she mentions the movement of her baby inside her. This rootlessness may be exactly a chance of absolute freedom for the baby.

The baby is safe at the end of the narrative. It is not the end of the story of Mulberry and Peach yet because even in the final pages, the two sides of the personality split are still having an unequal negotiation with one another, and the woman bearing these two names is still at large. A woman whose name and identity are unknown is found to be a victim of a car accident, and she is sent to a hospital for treatment. One may presume this is Peach, because in the last sentence of the main narrative she says, "I find the news story at the newsstand, I buy a copy for a souvenir after I escape from Mercy Hospital."[54] The same thing goes on. She gets her freedom, is carrying her baby and keeping a record of her personal history, and is in control of herself.

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[53] Ibid., 114.

[54] Ibid., 204.

If one continues the comparison between the experience of the schizophrenic woman and the Taiwan mentality, then the schizophrenic state is certainly not a solution to the problem of Taiwan's origin, for it is going to remain an on-going problem, and negotiations and compromises have to be carried out before some satisfactory answers obtained. Mulberry and Peach, in their nature, represent two different ways of responding to one's mother (culture) and these will lead to completely different ways of life and understanding of the self, just as Mulberry is trapped in her link to the past and Peach is liberated because she takes the past into her own hands and acknowledges or denies it as she sees fit. It is this liberated view of herself and her link to the past which provides a lead to the future, as Peach is the one who looks forward to the birth of her baby.

Although paradoxically the soon-to-be mother has to cut her links with her mother in order to look forward to her future, this is not suggested as the final end of the life journey of the schizophrenic woman. That is to say the split personality will go on with her split life, just as suggested in the fable "Princess Bird and the Sea,"[55] that there will be a continuation of effort to go back and forth. Neither an attachment to the mother(land) nor a clean break from her is suggested as the one solution to deal with the problem of orientation and belonging. The narrative of *Mulberry and Peach* is only a parody, an illustration of a culture's struggle with her motherland whose link with her has become dubious because of challenges from outside and the daughter's internal growth.

This dubious relationship between mother and daughter, as seen in the chaotic response Mulberry and Peach give to their mother culture, is depicted not only in overseas experiences, but also in Li Ang's nouvella about the old town Lucheng.

"The Butcher's Wife" is one of a series of studies of the small traditional town Lucheng, which is Li Ang's own native town.[56] In 1970, when she went to Taipei from Lucheng to pursue her university career, she had been trying to break out of her previous existentialist and psychoanalytic style and content of writing, but could not find a way out. It was then she "so naturally recalls the homeland, Lucheng, which has been nurturing [her] for years."[57] For her, the return to her hometown is not an attempt to create or follow a trend, but a natural stage of development for a writer.

It is interesting that Li Ang regards this move to explore her hometown a natural stage of a writer's development, for the period she takes Lucheng as the background to her stories is the period when she is away from it. Just as Nieh Hualing writes about her native Taiwan when she goes away, Li Ang refers to Lucheng again when she is no longer there. A physical distance may be useful in providing a critical perspective to look at an influence which has such an overwhelming power over her growth and personality development. "The Butcher's Wife" is based on a real life story transplanted to the town of Lucheng and restructured by the writer to fulfil her desire for an in-depth exploration of female exploitation in a traditional community. The relationships among characters as well as the cultural background from which it is produced suggest a reading at a level which may also reflect the push and pull relationship between Taiwan and the mother culture.

Before looking at the details of the story, a word is needed about the title. The text is originally written in Chinese, and translated into English by Howard

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[55] Ibid., 207.

[56] Ang Li 李昂, preface, *Sha fu: Lucheng gushi* 殺夫 - 鹿城故事 [The Butcher's Wife: Stories of Lucheng] (Taibei shi: Lianhe baoshe, 1997), v-ix.

Goldblatt.[58] As can be expected with all translations, there are certain gains and losses in the process, due to the differences between the original language and the target language as well as the cultural implications imbued in the two languages. In the Chinese original, the title *Sha fu* is an action, literally meaning "slaughtering the husband."[59] So literally the title of the story is an action, by Lin Shi, making her an active party, probably the only time in her life. In the English translation, however, the title becomes a noun; moreover, Lin Shi is a wife "belonging" to the butcher, as expressed in the possessive form. It is of course a genuine depiction of the situation Lin Shi has been in her whole life, yet it has taken away the significance of the major event of her life, the act of killing her husband.

The significance of this action can be interpreted in two ways. At one level, Lin Shi, as a submissive female all her life, finally does something which will make an impact on her own life, through her own choice, though whether it is the best thing to do is beside the point. The other level has to do with her mother. Since the day she is married to Chen Jiangshui, Lin Shi has been tolerating sexual, physical and mental torture, yet her response to these tortures has been avoidance rather than direct confrontation. She has tried to escape, to lessen the hurt to make her own life easier, but her methods are never assertive ones. One may argue that this killing is the result of being pushed to the end of her tolerance and it is a natural rebound; but it may not be pure coincidence that the moment she kills coincides with the first time Chen Jiangshui extends his brutalities to her mother. Her act of

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[57] Ibid., v.

[58] Ang Li, *The Butcher's Wife*, trans. Howard Goldblatt and Ellen Yeung (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (Hong Kong) Co. Ltd., 1990).

[59] "Sha" 殺 means to kill, to slaughter; "fu" 夫 is husband.

killing may have been done in a semi-conscious state, but it is carried out consciously with her mother in her mind, as will be seen in the following discussion.

The cause is that one day when Chen Jiangshui comes home, after hearing people's discussion of the strange behaviour of his wife, he sees that the house is all set for a standard ritual paying tribute to the dead. There are paper figures dressed in paper clothing, and also food supposedly for the dead, "all covered by a layer of incense ash."[60] Lin Shi is paying tribute to her mother, but, in Chinese custom, once a daughter is married, she no longer belongs to her maiden family and is considered a member of her husband's family;[61] therefore her action is interpreted by Chen Jiangshui as a curse on him, because he is the only family she has. To his superstitious mentality, Lin Shi is almost sending him goods as if he is dead:

> 'I've had enough of your phony concern, all that crap about praying for your mother. Up your old lady's cunt. Fuck her! I'm the one you're out to get!'
> 'Don't you say bad things about my mother.'[62]

The issue changes to a literal discussion of whether Chen Jiangshui is fucking her mother or not. Though this is not the issue, Lin Shi's mental state is so unstable that what is an expression of anger becomes to her a literal statement, and she is mixing up past and present.

What follows is the usual routine of Chen Jiangshui's' exercise of power, demanding not only sex, but her total submission by moaning and groaning for mercy. Then he rolls over and falls asleep, leaving the butcher's knife by his side:

> The broad-backed, thin-edged knife was extraordinarily heavy. Lin Shi gripped it with both hands and stabbed downwards. In the surrounding darkness, the

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[60] Ang Li, *The Butcher's Wife*, trans. Howard Goldblatt and Ellen Yeung (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (Hong Kong) Co. Ltd., 1990), 136.

[61] There is a Chinese saying expressing this idea: Jia chu nu, puo ch shui 嫁出女, 潑出水. Literally translated as "A married daughter is like poured away water."

[62] Ibid., 137.

> face of a man in a soldier's uniform flashed into view - there was a scar running from his eyebrow to his chin. Then it was a squealing, struggling pig with a butcher knife buried at an angle in its gullet, buckets of dark red blood gushing from the wound, the animal's body wracked with convulsions.[63]

Two images appear here at the moment of killing: the face of the soldier who raped her mother during the war, and the struggling pig she sees when her husband takes her to the abattoir. These two images are both determining elements in her life; the rape of her mother is interpreted as an incident compromising her mother's virtue and that indirectly puts Lin Shi into the hands of her uncle; the pig with the knife buried in its body is the symbol of Lin Shi in relation to her husband. The technique here is cinematic: the fate of her mother, Lin Shi's fate, and her response to these all superimpose on each other at this collusion of the three images. At the same time as her hands "stabbed downwards," the stories of the two generations are linked together and given a framework of reference.

Lin Shi and her mother are described in the same discourse throughout the story, although it is much more obvious towards the end. Both women are pushed to a highly compromising position because of one of the solid basic needs - food. One winter during wartime, they had been out of food for a long time and were close to starvation. Lin went out to pick firewood and she saw a young soldier going into the Lin's ancestral hall where she and her mother were staying, and she ran quickly to report this to her uncle to get help. When they returned, the soldier was half-naked, on top of her mother, having sex with her.[64] Her mother's response is given quite a detailed description:

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[63] Ibid., 138.

[64] The representation of this scene between the soldier and Lin Shi's mother is not a self-evident picture as to what actually had taken place. Therefore people like Auntie Ah-wang could represent Lin Shi's mother as a promiscuous woman. In this discussion, our interest is not to investigate the incident and find out the truth; instead the awareness of this ambiguity in what exactly is happening,

> She was chewing on one rice ball and clutching another in her hand. Low moaning sounds escaped from her mouth, which was stuffed with food. Half-eaten grains of white rice, mixed with saliva, dribbled down the side of her face, onto her neck, and down her shirtfront.[65]

This is a powerful condensation of many of the major themes in the book. Sex and food, two of the major human needs and desires, are finely colluded here in the picture of the soldier having his desires satisfied and the woman having her food. The simultaneity of the two events only makes the collusion more powerful: the woman beneath the man, eating her food, while the man gets what he wants.

The "low moaning" coming from her mother can well be the sign of satisfaction in her appetite for the sex, food, or both; and the half-eaten rice mixed with saliva dribbling down her face is an obvious parallel to the male ejaculation which could very well be happening right that moment. The interchangeability of sex and food, therefore, starts from here and this is going to be the theme which plays a dominant role in Lin Shi's life. Although she is finally married to the butcher Chen Jiangshui, her marriage is not much more than a transaction, moreover a transaction concerning food on one side. For though it is again not proved, neighbours see that every ten days or so, Chen would send a pound of meat to her uncle's place, and this is a time of serious food shortage. People begin to marvel at the amount of good meat brought by Lin Shi's skinny body; Lin Shi is actually "sold" for the amount of meat Chen Jiangshui brings to her uncle from time to time. Even for Lin Shi herself, the marriage signifies for her, among the torture and the housework, a chance to be fed.

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helps in a way, to further the point made about women's fate. Even though the truth is not fully known, the family has just the authority to deal with the woman in a manner they see fit solely according to their interpretation of the matter. It is also echoed later at the end of the story when people start telling each other the story of Lin Shi, as one replicating her mother's bad traces.

[65] Ang Li, *The Butcher's Wife*, trans. Howard Goldblatt and Ellen Yeung (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (Hong Kong) Co. Ltd., 1990), 7.

Note, however, again the link between food and sex even for the married Lin Shi. She is fed all right, but she has to "work" for it. Every time when Chen Jiangshui wants her, he will bring a large piece of meat from work, and she will be allowed to eat as much as she wants after he has satisfied his deviant desires by listening to her yelling for help. For the kick Chen Jiangshui gets out of the sex act is not only the physical satisfaction but also the sense of power when Lin Shi screams and moans beneath him. In fact, right before she kills him in his sleep, he threatens her with his knife demanding her to scream during intercourse:

> [He] took his butcher knife, which he carried with him at all times, and brandished it under her nose.
> 'If you don't scream and yell this time, I'll fix you good with this knife.'
> 'No, don't fuck my mother ...' Lin Shi mumbled, shrinking back.
> 'You gonna scream or not?' He mounted her. 'If you don't, I'll take you back to the slaughterhouse and really show you something good.'[66]

Pictorially this is a very powerful image. This man is on top of his wife, with a knife in his hands, and demands that she should scream and yell during intercourse. The act itself becomes a manifestation of power and exploitation in its visual image. It is exactly because the hierarchy of power is so direct that the image becomes overwhelming. In a community where material lack has stripped human relationships down to a minimum, its expression take the most direct route and the relatively unchanged economic situation renders the background between Lin Shi and her mother even more similar.

One of the characters who plays an important role in the representation of the feminine experience is Auntie Ah-wang. Her role is ambiguous. She is an old lady and among the female community, she has a somewhat respected position both

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[66] Ibid., 137.

because of her experience in life and her status as a widow.[67] Therefore in that community where young and old women do their washing together, her opinions are respected and on many occasions prevail as the representative viewpoint of the community. At first she seems to be a motherly figure to Lin Shi who is new, as can be deducted from the act of giving her a medicinal plaster after her wedding night for her wound. But then gradually both the reader and Lin Shi herself come to doubt her seeming all-giving maternity. Gradually she is represented as a sinister and sneaky busy-body who goes behind the scenes to spy on people's private matters; moreover she is not even afraid of being discovered doing so.

It is, for example, Auntie Ah-wang who spread the news that Lin Shi screams when her husband is having intercourse with her. In one of the casual conversations among the group, she makes insinuations about Lin Shi's character and goes further to shape the public opinion:

> 'It's all that greedy Lin Shi's doing. She can't get enough. She wants it day and night. I don't know how anyone can be so shameless! Who ever heard of anyone doing things like that in broad daylight?'
>
> More laughter.
>
> 'How do you know what other people do in broad daylight?' someone asked her.
>
> 'Oh, come on! She makes so much noise that people three miles away can hear her.'[68]

Having actually spied on Lin Shi and having given her the medicinal plaster, Auntie Ah-wang knows perfectly well that Lin Shi is far from enjoying it. Yet she puts it

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[67] The Chinese belief is that when the husband dies, the widow is supposed to live her widowhood to the end of her life, still fulfilling all her duties as a daughter-in-law to her husband's family. Re-marriage may be acceptable in some cases, but the most highly regarded quality in a woman is the absolute fidelity to her husband no matter what happens. That quality in Chinese is called "cong yi er zhong" 從一而終, meaning "to follow one through the end."

[68] Ang Li, *The Butcher's Wife*, trans. Howard Goldblatt and Ellen Yeung (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (Hong Kong) Co. Ltd., 1990), 102.

in such a way that Lin Shi is seen as a nymphomaniac and Chen the wronged husband whose name is blackened by her screaming.

Auntie Ah-wang's power lies, like many other maternal figures we have seen in this discussion, in her power of manipulating words. Her ability to represent things in the way she likes is carried to the extreme when she needs to clear her own character. Talking about herself as a direct opposite to Lin Shi, she says:

> 'Take me, for example. I always do what has to be done. When someone tried to assassinate my character, I knew that the only way to prove my virtue was in death. Well, you all saw what happened. The fact that I didn't die proves I was right. Instead of wanting me dead, Heaven let me return to speak the truth. Then take someone like Lin Shi, a woman who really wants to be screwed, but plays hard to get. Not only that ...'[69]

She is referring to an earlier occasion when her secret affair with a man is disclosed by her daughter-in-law, in front of everyone. In order to clear her name, she stages a scenario of attempted suicide and is saved just in time by Lin Shi and Chen Jiangshui. Despite the fact that it is her own staging she claims that her rescue is heaven-sent to clear her name. No matter which way it is, the power of discourse is none better demonstrated than by Auntie Ah-wang and her words. Her ability in expression shares the same power as when Brave Orchid links the legendary heroines in China to modern day American life; or as when Kwan calls forth the previous lives of Olivia and presents the connection through history.

The truth of Lin Shi's fate is announced by Auntie Ah-wang in a moment of causal conversation:

> 'Like mother, like daughter.' Auntie Ah-wang lowered her voice to heighten the conspiratorial effect. 'Did you all know that her mother committed adultery with a soldier about ten years ago, and when Lin Shi's uncle rushed over to catch them in the act, they were coupled together so tight no one could pull them apart?'[70]

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[69] Ibid., 103.

[70] Ibid.

It is significant that while Chen Jiangshui represents the physical side of power, it is a woman who materialises the "soft" side of oppression. Auntie Ah-wang has juxtaposed mother and daughter in talking about their likeness to each other, and this parallel traps both women in their oppressed condition. Her maternal appearance shows no maternal forgiveness and tolerance at all to the helpless Lin Shi, instead she is using her capability with words, a quality much revered in the mother's story-telling, to tell tales about Lin Shi, thus further compromising Lin Shi's already difficult life.

Auntie Ah-wang is a problematic character both as herself and as a comparable maternal figure beside Lin Shi's mother. In a way Auntie Ah-wang is making sure that Lin Shi's maternal inheritance is not beneficial to her. On the other hand, as an older woman who could be a maternal guide to the already orphaned and newly married Lin Shi, Auntie Ah-wang seems to have tried her best to land Lin Shi in the worst possible situation. Through the intervention of Auntie Ah-wang, maternal influence, whether biological or acquired, seems to be the thing Lin Shi has to get rid of in order to lead a decent life.

The importance of the mother's role in the daughter's life, in her understanding of herself, and ultimately in her self-defining acts, can also be shown from descriptions of episodes in Lin Shi's short life. In one of the most important moments, when Lin Shi kills her husband, what comes into her mind is the picture of the soldier's scarred face. It is the face of the oppressor rather than her mother in need of help which marks this crucial act, because her act is an ultimate attempt to get away from that position. All her life her mother has succumbed to oppression, and she has never been shown as protecting her daughter or guiding her behaviour at all. Lin Shi has become an orphan even before her mother dies because she is left

on her own. The mother's role as the provider of love and protection, as well as a sense of belonging is seriously challenged here.

Without a mother's hand, Lin Shi becomes an orphan just like many other women characters we have seen in the previous chapter. The difference between the Hong Kong and Taiwan narratives we have seen is that the Hong Kong characters are quite capable of being independent, though they may not be happy. They accept the situation because they are born with the knowledge of a lack; yet the female characters seen so far in this chapter are helpless because of the lack. They are manipulated by their husbands, for in the absence of the mother, the husband becomes the sole (soul) owner of them. It may be interesting to ask whether the difference in this aspect found in the two Chinese communities has anything to do with their different relationship to the Mainland, their motherland as regarded generally. If we continue with the parallel between the mentality of a culture and the mentality of an individual in that culture, then we may be able to make a case by saying that the contemporary Hong Kong generation has already been accustomed to the identity of an orphan and is seen to be coping with that. Contemporary Taiwan still seems to be sorting out her complicated relationship with the motherland, so it is still caught between the attempt to search and to identify with the mother, yet simultaneously resisting her.

That is why there is such a variety of different responses to the mother figures in this chapter. Yü and Lin Shi are both helpless without their mother. Mulberry is obviously frantic seeking an orientation left empty by the mother. Peach, on the other hand, has given up relying on the mother to find her a foothold, for she has instead celebrated her own rootlessness when she describes herself as a Jew from Asia. She, together with the following urban female character in Zhu Tianwen's

postmodern urban story "Shijimo de huali,"[71] forms an alternative relationship with the mother figure in her immediate culture. Since the mother, for various reasons, is not going to provide a foothold, or is actually trapping her in an impasse, then the way to get out of it is to break out and isolate oneself from this maternal bond.

Mia's position in "Shijimo de huali" is also one of isolation in the sense that she has no maternal bond in the story. The difference about her being cut off from her mother is that it is not as obvious as Peach's constant evasion of other people's restrictions on her, or Lin Shi's dramatic act of murder at the end of the nouvella. Mia's isolation is a subtle one, hidden under quiet and unobtrusive behaviour of beauty and pleasantness of fine gesture. In the extremely urban, materialist end-of-century society in Taibei, material life has gained the upper hand of human relationships and even the most rooted relationship one has with one's mother is not featured as major anymore. Mia's mother is nowhere to be seen in the story, her world is one of a lateral extension of the same generation.

"Shijimo de huali" is chosen as the closure to this discussion because the picture and sentiments conveyed in this story condense a lot of the issues and imagery discussed earlier in the other texts about female characters engaging in cross-generational and cross-cultural struggle to establish themselves in relation to their societies. The awareness of a Taiwan island mentality can be seen in the wavering and split scenarios in the experiences of the different female characters. Their relationship with their mother, whether present or absent, biological or cultural, is never stable nor one-sided. This uncertainty may well be a reflection of the

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[71] Tianwen Zhu 朱天文, "Shijimo de huali," 世紀末的華麗 [Fin-de-siècle Grandeur], *Shijimo de huali* 世紀末的華麗 [Fin-de-siècle Grandeur] (Hong Kong: Yuanliu chuban gongsi, 1993), 182-203.

doubts the writers, and probably many Taiwan citizens, have when they ponder their connection with China the Motherland.

The time is the end of the century, a young capitalist city Taibei has developed to its height in terms of the material standards it achieves, but it is also at the end of the century when fears and uncertainty as to what follows make people wonder. It is a point of probable break not only with the past but with the future as well, if the continuation of time and the coherence of history cannot withstand challenges. A doubt about history, especially the ability of history to provide human beings with the sense of origin, the source of orientation, will lead to a sense of individual alienation, a feeling of having no sentimental attachment to things and people apart from oneself, just like Mia in the story. The story is written with extreme care to the choice of words and depiction of colours, textures and shapes, but they seem to have replaced completely the role of affection between human beings.

David Dewei Wang seeks to trace the development of the sensibilities to be found in the Depravity Fiction in the late Qing era in the Taiwan fin-de-siècle writing. Regarding Zhu Tianwen's writing, he says:

> The 'new people' of Taipei - gay yuppies, models/mistresses, moviemakers, elite intellectuals - thrive and fail amid the hustle of the cosmopolitan city, desperately searching for love in vain. With a sense of eschatological melancholy and the urge to seize the day, Zhu Tianwen's characters abandon themselves to fin-de-siècle syndromes.[72]

The Taiwan society he sees in Zhu's writing is one similar to that of Hong Kong which we saw in the last chapter, especially in Huang Biyun's fictional world. Facing the unknown future, these characters who do not have a sense of connection to the past, feel extremely disoriented. The beginning of the story opens with the

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[72] David Dewei Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 317.

introduction of Mia's favourite activity, looking at the sky from her own balcony, and we are told in the story that she sees this as a way to predict her future.

If the story begins with the main character's anxiety to look at the sky in order to prepare for the future, then at the end of the story Mia has learned a more reliable way to predict the future. She makes recycled paper - not for a specific purpose, but just for the sake of knowing how:

> When old and faded, Mia has a craft to live by. The bottomless blue of the lake told her, one day the world constructed with man's discourse and system will collapse, she will survive in the memory of smell and colour, and reconstruct the world from there.[73]

Mia is a fashion model. When she has to retire, she needs something to support her life. The choice of making recycled paper is interesting not so much in the practical value it can bring to her, but in the nature of the activity. Recycled paper is made from used paper and is usually less colourful than the original paper. After a colourful life as a fashion model, her retired days will be supported by the recycling of non-verbal memories, the images of colour and smell once fresh.

The idea that it is the memory of smell and colour which constitute Mia's days is a feature which may be ascribed to a particular consciousness. She is described as "someone who believes in smell, relies on memory of smell to survive,"[74] and one who "relies equally on the memory of colour."[75] As Wang says, there are features which show Zhu's "indebtedness to Western fin-de-siècle aesthetics,"[76] but they also represent something unique in the context of our discussion. Mia's world is full of

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[73] Tianwen Zhu 朱天文, "Shijimo de huali," 世紀末的華麗 [Fin-de-siècle Grandeur], *Shijimo de huali* 世紀末的華麗 [Fin-de-siècle Grandeur] (Hong Kong: Yuanliu chuban gongsi, 1993), 203.

[74] Ibid., 182.

[75] Ibid.

[76] David Dewei Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-*

characters who search vainly for love because they are navigating on the surface of life and do not go deep into affection.

It is easy to see the heavy investment on elements of the senses in Mia's world. In a section when Mia's life experience is depicted, using a more or less chronological approach, we see:

> The cool and sharp mint tea. She remembers the light marine colours of the 90 summer.[77]
>
> In 87 when auction price of Iris hit new heights, yellow, purple and indigo immediately become the mainstream colour scheme.[78]
>
> Frankincense brings Mia back to 86 when she was 18. She and her boyfriends made love to nature.[79]
>
> Winter season 92, the courtly style was still popular. A cloak as the top, matching with tights or stockings; or knee-high boots.[80]
>
> Since spring 90, awareness of environmental conservation starts, ... nature is beauty, Mia gets rid of her mascara and eye liner, because eye shadow is not the focal point for make-up anymore.[81]

This is supposed to be a brief account of important landmarks in Mia's life. Apart from the years and seasons, however, what is depicted here are the styles and colours fashionable in different periods. Mia's life is unending changes of style.

The effect carried by this piece of life-fashion chronology is the superficiality of Mia's world. Her life is given in the form of a drawn-out fashion show where only the surface is meant to be seen, whether there is anything substantiating the

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*1911* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 317.

[77] Tianwen Zhu 朱天文, "Shijimo de huali," 世紀末的華麗 [Fin-de-siècle Grandeur], *Shijimo de huali* 世紀末的華麗 [Fin-de-siècle Grandeur] (Hong Kong: Yuanliu chuban gongsi, 1993), 183.

[78] Ibid., 187.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid., 194.

[81] Ibid., 196.

appearance is not important. In other words, Mia is portrayed like a full-sized Barbie doll, whose inner life is not a point of interest. Even Mia's friends are described in similar manner:

> The darkly chic Ann is forever trying to make herself darker, until she has a complexion which matches well with fluorescent red, green and yellow.[82]

Instead of choosing clothes to suit herself, she is changing herself to suit the clothes she wears. The appearance, the materiality of the body external is stressed in its equivalence to objects like fashion. Human sentiments are not mentioned at all.

Friendship takes on peculiar forms. Mia's friend Bo Bei does not like the idea of Mia staying with Lao Duan, a married man, and the method she chooses to convert Mia is to get herself married to an ordinary man:

> Not long after she received Bao Bei's wedding invitation, the address of which was written by Bao Bei. Nothing was written inside the card except for the printed message. The invitation card was ordinary, with a strong fragrance. The bridegroom has a strange name, the parents of the bridegroom have cheap and textureless names; with this, Bao Bei punishes her.[83]

This is a choice Bao Bei herself makes, but again emotions do not seem to play a role at all. We know that this is what Bao Bei has chosen to punish Mia with because she does not heed her advice, but even in this act of punishment, which in a way is an emotional blackmail, there is no sense of an intense feeling. The ability to feel, or at least to express one's sentiments seems to have gone at the end of the century.

This is what Wang calls "a hollow spectacle for people of Taipei who cannot love."[84] The entire story is a display of bodies and clothes, a network of styles

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[82] Ibid., 184.

[83] Ibid., 193.

[84] David Dewei Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-*

merging with one another without any link to a common root of orientation. Incapable of attaching herself emotionally to any person, Mia

> did not even have time to look at the bright colourful world, determined to go forward recklessly. Material world, why not? Seeking objects, seeking cash, youthful and beautiful. She adores her wonderful body.[85]

If there has to be a centre, a root where the characters can return to, it is the body. This existential entity becomes the only thing which is reliable in the face of a disconnected history with the past, and an undetermined extension to the future. The fin-de-siècle is an impasse just as Taiwan is at an impasse with the meditation of its relation with the Mainland.

The maternal bond between mother and daughter does not even feature in this short story of contemporary hyper-consumerist Taiwan. If we continue the scenario of reading Taiwan female writing as taking a certain route, exploring Taiwan's relationship with her motherland, Mainland China, then this short story, which was written in the early 1990s, may be a temporary stasis in this search. Previously Li Ang's "The Butcher's Wife," taking Lucheng, one of the most traditional towns in Taiwan, arrives at a point of the discussion when the mother is not even capable of taking care of her daughter, to such an extent that the daughter is totally unprepared for the world and not even clear about herself. The previous generation is represented by Auntie Ah-wang, her mother, the soldier who raped her mother, and the various rules and customs respected by the powerful in Lucheng. The mother figure is not necessarily a benefit to the daughter because her sense of awareness is directly and indirectly under this great suppression.

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*1911* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 318.

[85] Tianwen Zhu 朱天文, "Shijimo de huali," 世紀末的華麗 [Fin-de-siècle Grandeur], *Shijimo de huali* 世紀末的華麗 [Fin-de-siècle Grandeur] (Hong Kong: Yuanliu chuban gongsi, 1993), 190.

Mia's community, where the mother and daughter bond is not even mentioned, may be regarded as the latest manifestation of this link with the Mainland. The hyper-commercial and appearance-conscious city no longer has a place for older sentiments and impractical thoughts. Functionalism rules and this is a major break from a tradition which puts its emphasis on inter-personal experience and a hierarchy of positions everyone inhabits. This short story is like a step forward from the undetermined internal debate about the mother (culture), and enters the world of extreme individualism, where the only centre of focus is the self, like the way Mia admires her own body. While Li Ang's and Nieh Hualing's texts provide various views about the ambiguous relationship with the motherland and are seeking a way out of it, "Shijimo de huali" seems to suggest a moving forward as a solution. Not to look back at all at the faraway mother culture, the daughter city should look forward into the future.

Contemporary female writing produced in liberated Taiwan presents a contrast to that of Hong Kong, a Chinese community, having a mother and daughter relationship with the Mainland. While Hong Kong has been on its feet with the help of the British government for a continuous hundred and fifty years, Taiwan's record of sovereignty is shorter, more complicated and confusing. As a result the link with her mother(land) is also more sophisticated and hard to determine. Sensitive to changes in the international political climate, Taiwan's female writing also appears with a shift of focus, but is still trying to draw a way out of this intricate web of links. Therefore both "The Butcher's Wife" and *Mulberry and Peach* waver between seeing the mother as the original influence and thus should be followed and developed, and a freeing of oneself from this binding force; "The Net" and "Shijimo de huali" are presenting a more disapproving attitude to this influence.

Daughters of Taiwan today are still in the process of figuring out a way to handle its past because the historical consequence of the past is still affecting the present, yet bringing in a lot of adverse effects. Having seen the two ex-colonies of Chinese communities, and seeing their love-hate relationship with the Mainland, the last chapter of this discussion will be on the Mainland, the motherland of the two Chinese communities. Is the mother really too old for any good?

## Chapter Four

## Daughters of the Mainland Under the Shadow of "Mother China"

To review contemporary writing by female writers in the Mainland comes not only as a logical step after the previous chapters, but is in fact a conclusive move towards the end of this cross-cultural discussion of female self-representation in contemporary writing. Representations in narrative texts written by Chinese women in other places dramatise a series of negotiations between mothers and daughters, be they biologically or culturally linked. The links between the characters parallel the links between Chinese communities which identify themselves as branches of the mainstream Chinese legacy. The personal and general experiences depicted in these other communities of Chinese people inevitably refer to their link with the mother culture in pre-20$^{th}$ century China, no matter whether it is a rebellion against, or an attempted continuation. Mainland China, by virtue of its location and history, is seen as carrying the mother culture of the Chinese.

Family problems between mothers and daughters reveal a cultural gap on top of a generation gap, and point to a route of self-understanding via the recognition of one's roots. The daughters in the American-Chinese narratives may have numerous quarrels with their mothers whom they do not understand, but at the same time they discover that self-understanding cannot be completed without understanding the mother and the background to her experience. Although born and raised in a foreign land, the protagonists in the texts discussed found the links to a fuller picture of their identity buried in the distant Chinese culture where their mothers come from. Contemporary female writing from Hong Kong and Taiwan,

two ex-colonies of Chinese residents, extends a similar invitation to refer to the link with China the motherland.

The People's Republic of China (PRC), established in October 1949, claims to hold the legitimate legacy of ancient Chinese civilisation, as well as its largest community of Chinese. Studying Mainland culture is comparable to arriving at the end of a series of clues provided by the daughters' confessions. While the American-Chinese, the Hong Kong Chinese, and the Taiwan Chinese all engage in an exploration of their female awareness in relation to the influence of the mother culture, similar issues of self-representation are viewed differently here, where the sense of belonging originates.

The position of Mainland Chinese writers is problematic. Instead of demonstrating a final authority or a definitive sense of direction, Mainland Chinese literature throws up different problems and attempts to come to terms with them. The mother culture, for various reasons, does not give answers to the issues raised earlier in other Chinese writings, and neither does she point to a conclusive method for understanding the various Chinese communities in relation to herself. If the narratives of contemporary Chinese literature are looked upon as reflections of certain mentalities currently encountered in the Mainland, then descendants of the mother seem to be as much caught in the net of understanding as the overseas daughters are.

The reason for this absence of conclusive pointers in contemporary Chinese literature from the Mainland is the same as those facing her overseas daughters. Historical changes bring not only advancements in technology, and changes of thoughts, but also the way different people from different places interact with each other. Hong Kong and Taiwan have been put in uncertain and changing positions

in relation to their origin. International politics render the meaning of their relationship with China complicated and makes identity a vexed issue. Even on the same piece of land, the standing of the same ethnic groups will change over time because of changing circumstances. China is one of the oldest civilisations, but it has never been a uniform entity throughout its long history.

The Mainland may be regarded as the rightful heir of Chinese civilisation among the various Chinese communities, but the PRC which represents this culture today is a political formation at a specific moment, its aim being to bring traditional China into the independent new world. In the last stages of the civil war between KMT and the Communists, people were waiting for the victory of Mao's army because by then it was obvious that the corrupt KMT government was losing. Calling the Communist Party's victory a liberation not only indicates a release from the confines of the war and insecurity, but also implies bringing in a new era when people would be rid of the ancient concepts and ideologies which had been restricting Chinese people for thousands of years. The establishment of this new country has the mission of freeing people from the past and encouraging them to look forward instead of backwards. The task proves enormously difficult, as can be seen from the traumas in modern Chinese history concerning the struggles between the old and the new, struggles which are reflected in the modern female writing.

The civil war between the two parties was not just a fight between two kinds of political ideologies, but also a combat between two forms of power which originated at different times in history. The KMT government ended in corruption and disillusionment while Communism was perceived as a means of dismantling the class structure to bring equality to all. Communism was upheld as the hope for the

people because it was new, and was heralded as having been born out of the necessity of the global conditions. Following that, there was a series of movements in China to confirm Communist rule, cumulating in the Great Leap Forward in the mid-1960s.[1] Although it turned out to be a disaster for many people, when it was launched its aim to bring China close to the most advanced country in the world was recognised.

Then the Cultural Revolution[2] broke out as the last stages of an internal power struggle, having fermented for a long time. In hindsight, many said it was a purge staged by Mao Zedong against his opponents. The ten-year Cultural Revolution becomes one of the most traumatic decades in modern Chinese history as well as world history. The loss of life, the aborted progress in science and knowledge because of the focus on political activities, not to mention the trauma left in the survivors of this political movement, outlives the ten years of its duration, its effects can be seen in the proportion of literary writing using the Revolution as direct or

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[1] The Great Leap Forward was a movement to modernise China by means of industrial production. China took Western countries as the target and intended to race against them in basic heavy industrial production like iron and steel. One of the slogans at the time was "Five years to catch up with Britain and match the US ..." As can be seen from the slogan, the focus was products of heavy industry. The urge to race these world powers in production was so great that at a time, every other daily activity was stopped to give way to these productions. Land was not farmed, schools did not hold classes, for all the time, energy and available resources were gathered and focused on the production of steel. Jung Chang (Rong Zhang), *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (London: Flamingo, 1991), Steven W. Mosher, *A Mother's Ordeal: The Story of Chi An* (London: Warner Books, 1993) and other narratives about this period of Chinese history quite often make a note of that overwhelming disruption to people's daily life.

[2] The Cultural Revolution is one of the most dramatic political movements in modern Chinese history. Officially the movement started in 1966 and went on till the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, but besides the actual revolution, a series of other political activities like the Great Leap Forward, and the Blooming of a Hundred Flowers could be seen as preparations heralding its approach. For some, the Cultural Revolution was a massive power struggle among the group who led China at the time, its initiator none other than Mao himself. It was said that seeing the possibility of insecurity in his foothold, Mao set this up to eliminate his most powerful enemies. This perspective is taken by Zhisui Li 李志綏 in his *Mao Zedong siren yisheng huiyilu* 毛澤東私人醫生回憶錄 [The Private Life of Chairman Mao: The Memoirs of Mao's Personal Physician] (Taibei shi: Shibao wenhua chuban qiye youxian gongsi, 1994) as well as Nien Cheng in her *Life and Death in Shanghai* (London: Flamingo, 1986), most obviously in the incident of Liu Shaoqi's fall from grace and accidental death in a plane crash.

indirect background of individual narratives. The mass experience of the revolution has left an indelible mark on individuals and their families, as can be illustrated from the narrative texts discussed in this chapter.

After the death of Mao Zedong,[3] and the arrest of the Gang of Four,[4] the government launched another massive policy on the lives of ordinary people. The One-Child policy was launched to check the rapid growth of population by issuing quotas to couples who wanted to raise a family. Compared to the Cultural Revolution, the impact of this policy was limited in terms of the number of people involved and the extent of the destruction. But for women who want to be mothers, it is a major invasion of an element of their identity.

This brief outline of major events in Modern China points towards what Rey Chow has singled out as qualities distinguishing this writing:

> While there are many efforts to demonstrate modern Chinese literature's continuity with past literary achievements, what distinguishes modern Chinese writings is an investment in suffering, an investment that aims at exposing social injustice.[5]

This emphasis on social injustice is also demonstrated here in the selection of narrative texts to be discussed. Among the six personal female narratives to be examined in this chapter, five of them are about the personal struggles and sufferings amidst the collective disasters, the civil war, the Cultural Revolution, and One-Child policy. Only one of the texts is about a relatively isolated incident of pain. The

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[3] 9th September 1976.

[4] Gang of Four: they are Zhang Chunqiao 張春橋, Wang Hongwen 王洪文, Yao Wenyuan 姚文元, Jiang Qing 江青. The name of the group is quoted by Mao himself, meaning that he was quite aware of the ambition of these people as well as the attempt they were making to have their own power. In Li Zhisui's memoir, he describes Mao as very perceptive of what they planned to do. After Mao's death, the Gang of Four was immediately arrested. They were tried later and were all imprisoned.

[5] Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 102.

new China does not seem to succeed in eliminating pain from the past.

The overwhelming presence of suffering in modern Chinese literature puts it in a special position in relation to the mother culture, comparable to literature we have examined from the other major Chinese communities. Rey Chow quotes Abdul R. Jan Mohamed and David Lloyd's definition of minority discourse to apply it to modern Chinese writing:

> minority discourse is, in the first instance, the product of damage, of damage more or less systematically inflicted on cultures produced as minorities by the dominant culture.[6]

Mainland China, although with the largest population in the world, exhibits a minority mentality in its modern literature if perceived this way. Modern Chinese writing can be juxtaposed with the other Chinese writings discussed because of its break with ancient history.

The following is a discussion of selected texts written by female Chinese writers, all of which are about mothers and daughters directly or indirectly. The earliest text discussed was published in 1936, an autobiography by Hsieh Ping-ying,[7] about her youthful rebellions and her experience of going to the frontline during the Second Sino-Japanese war. The book is a starting point in preparation for this examination of contemporary Chinese writing because the war was an important landmark for a lot of young women. Hsieh Ping-ying, the protagonist-narrator, is a representative engaged in the same negotiations going on between mothers and

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[6] Ibid., 100-01.

[7] Ping-ying Hsieh (Bingying Xie) was born in 1903 or 1906 (sources vary). In her youth, because of her privileged background and because she was a young daughter after several sons, she had already escaped many of the unfortunate circumstances facing other girls. The May Fourth movement brought new challenges to traditional Chinese society, and being one of the young women studying in schools at the time, Ping-ying was also influenced by the enlightenment of this movement. Her later decision to join the army and be one of the earliest women soldiers were examples of this influence. This record of her youth, her intellectual development as well as an early glimpse into her life in the army was first published in 1936, and serves as a useful introduction

daughters at the time, both at the level of the fight between the biological mother and daughter, and the conceptual combat between the mother generation and the new daughter who has been hailed by the new ideologies of independence.

*Autobiography of a Chinese Girl*[8] is a bold venture in many ways. The writing of an autobiography by a young woman, intended for publication, was a brave attempt because of the habitually lower status of the female in the Chinese hierarchy of respect. What justified such an attempt were the unusual actions Ping-ying had undertaken, up to the point when she enrolled in the army and received training in order to defend her country. Her decision to be a soldier, and moreover, to record her adventures in an autobiography intended for other people, starts the series of self-exploration in the following pages. Although the historical background is different and the events unrelated to the other five texts chosen, Ping-ying's autobiography shares two very important features with these other narratives. They are self-conscious ventures at understanding the self in the midst of a collective experience, and the link this always has with the mother figure.

In this case, the collective experience is the Sino-Japanese war at the background of her narrative. Although not directly foregrounded in the text, it is the reason for Ping-ying's decision, and the imminence of war clashes with ordinary reality and creates a space for Ping-ying and many other women to think about their lives and the possibilities now open to them. The war brings with it hardships and difficulties in daily life which in turn stimulate individual responses absent in times of peace and security. These narratives are good illustrations of how individual women come to an awareness of themselves in hindsight over traumatic struggles.

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of the changes women undergo in recent Chinese history.

[8] Ping-ying Hsieh (Bingying Xie), *Autobiography of a Chinese Girl*, trans. Tsui Chi (London:

The second element these texts share, is the playing out of the mother-daughter relationship in various forms. As in other texts discussed in previous chapters, the biological mother may be present or absent, benevolent or malevolent, but interaction with her never fails to leave a mark on the growth of the daughter. In some narratives, the mother's involvement in her daughter's life reproduces herself in the daughter, as supportive mothers are seen to rear well-oriented daughters in some texts. In others, the absent mother or a negative mother-surrogate leaves the daughter with no foothold as to what to be, such as the orphaned Adeline who spends her whole life trying to obtain other people's approval. Nancy Chodorow's theory of the reproduction of the mothering function through the mothering process seems to apply here as well.

*Life and Death in Shanghai*[9] is a record of traumatic experience in the Cultural Revolution with a difference in the identity of the narrator. Nien Cheng is a woman survivor of the event because of her personal toughness and her ability to fight the verbal battles involved in her trials with a clear mind and a persistence which even outbeats her persecutors. Her personal narrative, one of the many narratives by survivors from the Cultural Revolution, differs from the other texts studied here, because she writes as a mother. Marianne Hirsch remarks on the prevalence of the daughter's side of the story when she discusses the mother-daughter plot from Greek mythology.[10] Chinese women's writing examined in this discussion exhibits the same tendency. In Nien Cheng's case, her daughter dies during the revolution and her own survival is an experience gained through her face-

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Pandora, (1943) 1986).

[9] Nien Cheng (Nian Zheng), *Life and Death in Shanghai* (Flamingo: London, 1986).

[10] Marianne Hirsch, *Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington:

to-face combat with her mother culture.

Therefore, *Life and Death in Shanghai* is a mother's record of how she suffers loss and pain during the massive destruction of the revolution, and of how, after staying in a foreign land for years, she comes to face finally her native place and is forced into a recognition and understanding of what it means to be a Chinese daughter. Besides the maternal bond between Nien Cheng and her young daughter, what the narrative focuses on is the intricate link between Nien Cheng, the foreign educated daughter, and her Chinese motherland. The clash seen within Ping-ying's family is upgraded to a national scale in the Cultural Revolution, when individuality is seriously curtailed and the concept of family is almost non-existent.

The mother and daughter bond assumes an equally delicate and intriguing form in *A Mother's Ordeal*[11] by Steven Mosher.[12] As the title already suggests, it was a terrible experience for a mother, among a collective of mothers in the mid-1970s to early 1980s because of China's One-Child Policy.[13] The unique experience of this mother, Chi An, is worth studying because in the course of the implementation of

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Indiana University Press, 1989).

[11] Mosher, Steven W., *A Mother's Ordeal: One Woman's Fight Against China's One-Child Policy* (London: Warner Books, 1993).

[12] Steven Mosher is the writer of the book *A Mother's Ordeal: One Woman's Fight Against China's One-Child Policy* (London: Warner Books, 1993). The story, as he says in the preface, belongs to Chi An because it was a first personal experience. His aim in the composition of this book is first of all an attempt to help. During the involvement with Chi An's case, he comes to see more of the ironic situation of the matter and finally interviews Chi An to get the full story. Mosher is fluent in Mandarin, therefore the interviews are done in Mandarin which he later transcribes into English.

[13] After the Cultural Revolution, one of the most serious problems facing China is the rapid increase in population. To monitor the increase, in 1979 China put forward the One-Child Policy. It forces women to apply for a permit from the family planning office as well as their employers in order to have their first child. The women can be turned down if their neighbourhood had exceeded the quota. Newly weds are automatically denied their permit if they have certain medical conditions. Other tactics include coerced abortions, forced sterilisation after the first child, punitive taxes, and even jail-time. The punitive taxes for couples who decide to have a second child are often worth 3 years of combines salaries from both parents. Jail-time and extremely heavy fines are used as a measure to discourage birth certificate forgery. Because of this heavy punishment, many of the girl children born were killed and hidden in order to have the chance of getting a son, as is all important

this policy, she changes over from the position of a facilitator to a victim. This assumption of the opposite role shocks her into realising what the policy means for a large group of women, and later herself. Mothers are the source of life but in this collective experience, the individual is denied by the motherland.

The telling of the story is already a triumph of this individual motherhood which seeks to give life rather than to take life. Chi An safely arrives at America, and gives birth to a second child against the rule of her motherland. The telling of this success story to an international readership, through the intervention of Mosher, is a triumph over the motherland because it is a personal pursuit with the cooperation of her own mother plus her determination to do what she thinks is correct. The young mother seeks outside help in fighting against the old motherland which is in trouble because her population policy is in conflict with the modern world outside. The need to tell this story, moreover in a foreign tongue, is paramount because it is a sign of the new motherhood announcing her victory over her old motherland.

While Ping-ying, Nien Cheng and Chi An tell their tales of struggle and final break away from their mother(land), these are not representative of all the female writing in contemporary China. In the midst of the collective crises, people's individual responses differ, so do their ways of interpretation. To some, the encounter with both biological and cultural mothers arouses a sense of individualism, a desire to break away from the mother(land), but to some others, the experience of a discord with the motherland means a need to continue the companionship with the mother, or even a cultivation of her legacy. Adeline Mah[14]

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in the Chinese thinking.

[14] Adeline Yen Mah 馬嚴君玲, born in Shanghai. She was thought to have brought bad luck to her family because her mother died giving birth to her. Her childhood and young adulthood passed under heavy discrimination by her family, especially her stepmother, before she achieved final self-

and Jie Zhang[15] write personal narratives about their lives with their mothers, as a text of continuing the mother's legacy.

*Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots*[16] has received international acclaim because of the power of its story-telling. This story of the life of an unwanted Chinese daughter finally achieving success and recognition in a foreign place has the ability to move because of the courage shown by the female protagonist in overcoming physical and psychological obstacles on her way to self-acceptance. Adeline's story is interesting in many ways; as the youngest orphan, she inhabits a typically unfavourable position especially when she is the cause of her mother's death. Added to this is the interesting detail that her stepmother is partly of foreign descent. The stepmother, in this case, who is literally an Other to her culture, features as interesting comparison to the other mother-daughter bonds.

Adeline's aunt, on the other hand, is portrayed as quite a different figure to the stepmother. She is practically a surrogate mother all through her childhood, and has instilled in her the courage to overcome her hardships. Adeline, the unwanted child, craves for a sense of belonging to the family almost all her life, and it is this Aunt Baba who sustains her sense of belonging even when she is away from China. In a way, Aunt Baba can be interpreted as embodying the best qualities of a Chinese woman: resilience, hard-work, and persistence in her hope for the future. Her choice to stay in Shanghai even at the worst of times, and her refusal to feel regret

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recognition and relative freedom.

[15] Jie Zhang 張潔, born in 1937 in Beijing. After graduating from a Chinese university, she started her writing career in 1978. Zhang Jie is the only writer in China who has been awarded a national prize in the categories of short, medium and full length prose works. Her work has been translated into different languages, and she is now the current deputy chairperson of Beijing Writers Association.

[16] Adeline Yen Mah, *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots: The True Story of An Unwanted Chinese Daughter* (Penguin: London, 1997).

about this decision gives the book its title. Towards the end of the book, Adeline's return visit to China is a visit to her aunt, and the "root" is as much about China the culture, as what Aunt Baba represents to Adeline.

Adeline's close attachment to her motherland, despite her long years and relative success in America, is echoed in the diary-form narrative by Zhang Jie. *Shijie shang zui tengwo de na ge ren qu le*[17] is a record of the last days of her mother, how they discovered her deteriorating health, and the final battle they fought with the illness which finally claims her mother's life. This narrative is the only one among the six discussed here which does not take a collective crisis as the background. The civil war, the Cultural Revolution and the One-Child policy do not feature in the narrative at all. What is seen is a personal drama between the aged mother, the middle-aged daughter who is the narrator, and the granddaughter, who does not play an important role in terms of action, but whose presence is needed for the completion of the cycle of female bonding.

Apart from details of the condition of her mother, Zhang Jie's narrative is filled with personal regret and blame for not having taken good care of her mother. The book itself, therefore, acts as a confession as well as an attempt to make up for what the narrator has failed to do in the past. The writing of the book becomes a substitution for tending to the now dead mother, because the narrator needs a centre to her existence, a point of orientation. Although she is already a middle-aged mother, the need for attachment to her own mother is shown to be no less than the other women we have seen in various texts. Individuation comes only at the end of her mother's physical presence.

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[17] Jie Zhang 張潔, *Shijie shang zui tengwo de na ge ren qu le* 世界上最疼我的那個人去了 [The One Who Loves Me the Most Is Gone] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1994).

Chang Jung's[18] massive tale of collective suffering in the history of PRC is more complicated in terms of the feelings invested in the struggle with the motherland. Chang as a Chinese émigré, has the distance to view the relationship with her mother(land) more critically. Similarly a tale crossing three generations, her narration of her grandmother and mother's unquestioned loyalty to their motherland does not find the same echo in herself, and her feelings towards the motherland remain complex. Her indeterminate attitude to her mother and motherland is the reason why the narrative could be constructed. For the tale about the three generations of women is not a straightforward handing down of a legacy from mother to daughter. In the transmission of the mother's teachings, there is the birth of the daughter's awareness stimulated by the forceful external surroundings in the political movements.

Unlike all the other texts in this chapter, *Wild Swans* is the record of a struggle which is not yet finished. The struggle is not only between the general public and the harsh surroundings under the oppressive political system, but a more psychological struggle apparent even during the writing of these events. This book can be seen as a watershed between two attitudes to the mother culture: the young daughters who seek to break away from the mothers because they are oppressed by the restrictions and even destructive power of the mother; and the attitude to continue the legacy of the mother because they relish the sense of continuation from their foremothers.

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[18] Jung Chang (Rong Zhang) 張戎was born in Yibin, Sichuan Province, China, in 1952. She was a Red Guard when very young, later worked several jobs before becoming an English-language student. She left China for UK in 1978, got a scholarship from York University, and then received her doctorate in 1982. She lives in London and teaches at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University. (Adapted from Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*, London: Flamingo, 1991.)

*Autobiography of a Chinese Girl* strictly speaking is not a product of what is regarded as modern China, the PRC, for it was first published in 1936[19] before its establishment. The war effort the protagonist is going to join is made for the Second Sino-Japanese War, which later merged with the Second World War. The discussion of this text is included here because the time, the occasion when it was published and the nature of the writing show an early manifestation of the large-scale conflict found in contemporary China. The Sino-Japanese War (1937-45) came as a threat to China after more than twenty-five years of peace, since the Revolution which ended the Qing Dynasty.[20] In this time of crisis, old ideas are challenged and tested for their ability to stand the change, whereas new ideas rise to satisfy new needs.

The autobiography records Ping-ying's experiences in her youth, up to the time when she escapes and joins the other young fighters in Shanghai, ready for action to defend their country. Coming from a traditional scholar's family, Ping-ying has to fight battle after battle against her mother and other senior members of her family to get her way. The autobiography is a record of struggle and her gradual realisation of her position through these struggles. The nature of these struggles is interesting: although her father is a powerful person and much respected scholar, it is her mother who opposes her and restricts her behaviour. Probably because in the traditional

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[19] It was first published in 1936 in Chinese as *Nubing zizhuan* 女兵自傳 [Diary of a Woman Soldier], published again in 1980 by Dongda tushu gongsi, Taibei shi. The 1943 edition used throughout this discussion is a translated English version.

[20] Qing 清 Dynasty (1644-1911), the last dynasty in imperial China. The Manchus ruled with a number of compromises to the general protest of the Han Chinese. Throughout the Manchu rule, China had quite a stable government. Its downfall came by sea in the southern port cities and then spread to infect every part of the empire. Westerners had discovered the wonders of China, and starting from the seventeenth century, arrived in great numbers. Western traders looked for great profits, missionaries to convert the Chinese people, soldiers of fortune sought to exploit the new land. The rulers of the land did not know how to respond to these new problems, in the face of foreign invasion, the Chinese empire collapsed in February 1912.

Chinese family, housekeeping, including the care of children, comes under the mother's responsibility. Therefore the narrative reads like a series of mother-daughter confrontations on every possible subject concerning her growth.

The narrative starts with a very telling episode which sets the tone of the story and gives an indication of the mother-daughter relationship in the following narrative. The first chapter of part one, which usually consists of the earliest childhood days of the narrator, is entitled "What my grandmother told me."[21] The grandmother, who is one generation removed from the girl, is responsible for communicating to her the earliest history of her life. This is immediately suggestive because it is usually the mother's job, and Ping-ying's mother is alive and present. The query about Ping-ying's relationship with her mother is solved when grandmother is recorded as saying:

> My little Treasure, do not cry again. If your mother hears you, she will come and beat you once more.[22]

The relationship among these three generations forms an interesting lineage. The grandmother, as the oldest, commands the greatest respect, tends to be over-protective of the young and tries to be the mediator between the mother and the daughter.

This grandmother-mediator position can be further seen in the next section of her dialogue with Ping-ying:

> You should know that your mother, although having suffered so much for your sake, loved you the instant you were born. My Treasure, from henceforth you must not annoy her, and you must remember her sufferings and her agonies for you.[23]

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[21] Ping-ying Hsieh (Bingying Xie), *Autobiography of a Chinese Girl*, trans. Tsui Chi (London: Pandora, (1943) 1986), 25.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., 27.

Obviously she would like to repair the emotional damage the mother has done to the child and seeks to foster in Ping-ying a grateful feeling towards the mother. But the six-year-old Ping-ying has an attitude of her own:

> In my little mind I could picture to myself the sufferings my mother underwent when she gave me life. But curiously enough there was in my mind at the same time a deep impression of my mother beating me very severely on that same day.[24]

It is not a total disbelief that is exhibited by the girl, but at least in hindsight, when this autobiography was written, the daughter's feeling towards the mother, especially her mother's love for her, is not an unquestioning belief and acceptance. Ping-ying is not a girl who just follows what the others say, she has a mind of her own and she makes her own judgement based on her own observations.

This is indeed the source of the problem between mother and daughter. They have confrontations because Ping-ying will not simply listen to her mother, she has to think and follow her own judgement. If she does not agree, she will not submit just to humour other people, not even her mother. The first incident showing this source of confrontation between them is the time when Ping-ying wants to go to school to study. It is an unusual thing for a girl to do, but she perseveres and finally her mother agrees. This early incident in her life is important because her mother's behaviour in this matter shows very well that she and Ping-ying are, despite their frequent confrontations, very much akin to each other when their personalities are concerned.

Some of the local people are not too happy about this girl going to the same school as the boys, because they think it is not proper, and they make no secret of

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[24] Ibid., 27-28.

their discontent to Ping-ying's mother. But Ping-ying says it is "all to the good"[25] because her mother, like her, is "of a very persevering nature,"[26] and given her mother's social position in Hsieh-To-Shan, there is almost nothing she cannot do once she sets her mind to it. Ping-ying successfully gets into a private school where no girls have ever entered, because of her mother's social position and her strong character. From narration of small incidents like this, an important message is carried across from the early part of the autobiography: although they differ in the ways they see things, Ping-ying is just another copy of her mother. They are both headstrong and stubborn, believing firmly in what they think.

Conflicts between mother and daughter arise because her mother deems the elementary private education already enough for her. Besides, she is engaged to somebody from birth, and she has to start embroidering for her trousseau in preparation for her wedding. To Ping-ying, she says,

> You are a girl who can only be a dutiful wife and a good mother, looking after your parents-in-law and the affairs of your family. What possible need is there for you to study?[27]

This is spoken in almost the same tone as Jade Snow's father when he discusses his daughter's education. To a mother who is brought up firmly in this belief, there is no need to go to school at all. But to Ping-ying, this is a matter of establishing her own critical stance:

> My mother must have known that all I wanted was to go on studying, so she would not look at me. This made me more determined than every (*sic*) to end my life.[28]

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[25] Ibid., 48.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 53.

[28] Ibid., 55.

After Ping-ying has starved herself for two days, her mother submits because she fears Ping-ying is really going to die.

Like Maxine and Olivia, Ping-ying "have doubts about [her] mother's love for [her],"[29] because to her a mother who loves her daughter cannot refuse her what she wants. The daughter doubts her mother's love because of their contradictory views regarding what is good for her. From the mother's point of view, marriage and following the social conventions are the best for Ping-ying, she has done her mother's duty by preparing all that is needed for her. But of course, this mother-daughter bond is in the context of social change, which means different requirements for different people. The movement of history is casting its impact on the old and new generations alike. The two women, mother and daughter, respond in different ways though their personalities are quite similar.

Their different responses to matters bring out more and more the gap between their understanding of their society, and ironically, the similarity in their temperaments. When the issue of Ping-ying's engagement is brought up and her desire to have it broken is made known, her mother is furious because the idea is against what she has been taught all her life:

> 'This is ridiculous! How can one set oneself against the rules of propriety?' my mother shouted in anger. 'They were established by our Sage, and for many thousands of years they have been governing our lives. How dare a mere girl like our daughter act against them? How can it be possible that with all pagodas and monuments erected in honour of chaste women of all ages, they cannot be a reminder to the girls of our generation?'[30]

Hers is the typical view of more conservative Chinese, because they uphold traditions. What has been set down as rules and principles by the ancestors must be

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[29] Ibid.

followed and their persistence over such a long time is proof of their validity. But of course it is exactly because they do not question the set rules that they are kept and handed down to the next generation. Their attitude of ignoring social changes will only maintain the status quo.

Being sensitive to the immediate crisis of her country, and the inevitable changes taking place everywhere in China, Ping-ying decides to leave her family and join the army. After several unsuccessful attempts, she manages to escape from home and starts to wander. Her mind is set and this is a break with her family and the traditional system, which is embodied by her mother. This can be seen in the thoughts and ideas expressed in the poem she composes as she leaves:

> O, my beautiful native land,
> You have intoxicated the soul of my childhood,
> And have also wasted away the best time of my life.
> There is nothing left but bloody scars on my heart.[31]

It is a farewell to the place where she was born, a farewell to home, to her mother and also the old system of thinking upheld by her parents. Note the last sentence of this stanza: "There is nothing left but bloody scars on my heart." The past is damaging to her because it is a burden, preventing her from going at full speed in seeking what she wants.

Ping-ying's autobiography ends at the moment she arrives at Shanghai, tired and broke and frustrated, but luckily she gets help from other young people who are similar-minded in overthrowing the old system and seeking new life. The last sentence of the text is:

> He carried my luggage with him, and full of hope and a sense of deliverance, together with an acrid smell of sweat about us, we walked towards the

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[30] Ibid., 143.

[31] Ibid., 184.

Bund.[32]

The journey's end is an environment of hardship, but the most important element for an extension into the future is also present: hope. The breakaway from home ends in hope because there is a future to look forward to, and life is moving forward rather than backward. It is important for this autobiography to document Ping-ying's journey from home to the outside world because it is a very clear demonstration of her urge to do away with the burden of history and free herself into the unknown possibility of the days to come. The mother and the traditional beliefs are left behind with no regrets because Ping-ying has a mind of her own, she does not need to rely on the instructions from the old system to know what to do, as her mother is.

The struggle with the then revolutionary culture is much more violent and painful as recorded in *Life and Death in Shanghai* by Nien Cheng. While Ping-ying fight against her mother because her thoughts and beliefs are different, her struggle is basically within the family and she gets help and support from outside, or some of her peers. To Nien Cheng, however, the struggle is a one-woman struggle against the entire system of her country at the time of the Cultural Revolution. No outside support is given to her, though this struggle is a matter of life and death. The case of Cheng and her daughter in the Cultural Revolution is revealing because of their position in relation to China, their mother country. Cheng was born in China though she was educated in Britain, and has enjoyed a privileged position in Shanghai; her daughter was born in Australia but returned to China in her youth and is caught in this massive political movement. It is a mother (culture) and daughter bond of a very special kind.

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[32] Ibid., 216.

The need to record this experience, however, is similar to Ping-ying's urge to put down her rebellion and exile in black and white. Already advanced in age, Cheng discovers that there is still a whole lot about herself which she does not know because no encounter between her and the motherland has ever given rise to the need to find out before. The new China engages her in one of the most dramatic political movements in history and this forces her to look hard at both herself and her mother culture. To Cheng, who has a Western university education, and who has been in the elite social hierarchy, the hardships and the provocation in the process of the revolution are stripping off every protection given to her in her elitist position. The Cultural Revolution destroys not only her immediate family, but also the emotional link between her and her motherland.

"The past is forever with me and I remember it all"[33] sets the tone of the narrative. What is to follow is an indelible memory of great suffering and enlightenment. The establishment of this autobiographic note is important because this is a personal experience amongst a collective movement, and it has great impact on her understanding of the relationship with her mother culture. At the beginning of the narrative, although she has returned to China and stayed on after 1949, her position is still that of the elite, and she is very much aware of it, as from the description of her own house:

> The shaded reading-lamp left half the room in shadows, but the gleam of silk brocade of the red cushions on the white sofa stood out vividly.
>
> An English friend, a frequent visitor to my home in Shanghai, once called it 'an oasis of comfort and elegance in the midst of the city's drabness'.[34]

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[33] Nien Cheng (Nian Zheng), *Life and Death in Shanghai* (Flamingo: London, 1986), 11.

[34] Ibid.

She herself is well aware that her lifestyle is a world apart from the ordinary people, almost a refuge from the stark reality.

Her Western education sets her apart and makes her an easy target for persecution during the Cultural Revolution because to a great extent, this political movement has an intensely xenophobic tendency, an attempt to purify the internal thoughts of the country. Her different upbringing also means a particular way of behaviour, as can very well be seen in her struggle against the persecution launched on her. Not only is she daring enough to counter-attack using the same strategy her persecutors use on her, but in the various detention centres, she still seeks to keep up a decent personal appearance and refuses to be affected by the adverse living conditions and her compromised status. Cheng's Western education and "foreign" ways lend this struggle an extra dimension. The treatment she receives from her prosecutors in the name of the revolution symbolises her mother culture's attitude to the Westernisation which threatens to undo the Chinese cultural link.

Language plays an important role in personal struggles during the Cultural Revolution. When talking about the experience of some friends, Cheng writes: "Repeatedly they had to write their life histories critically; each time, the Party representative demanded a more self-searching effort."[35] People singled out for reformation or persecution will have to write over and over again their life stories until the Party approves. What the persecutors are after are not facts, but the representation of the facts. The same thing happens to Cheng. She is asked to write an autobiography, not about facts of her life, but her "political standpoint"[36]

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[35] Ibid., 36.

[36] Ibid., 192.

and her "sincerity."[37] When she submits five pages of facts about her life, she is reprimanded because they would like her to dress the facts in the colour they want.

In this desperate confrontation with her mother(land), Cheng plays the game according to the rule of these people, but taking advantage of the irony inherent in the rules to safeguard herself. Since the policies and rules of the movement are very much embodied in the words and slogans made from the sayings of Chairman Mao Zedong, very often the confrontation between the red guards and Cheng comes in the form of a verbal repartee from the same repertoire. The following is an example:

> The young worker joined in and said, 'Our Great Leader Chairman Mao taught us to be self-reliant. We do not need foreign companies.'
>
> 'Our Great Leader Chairman Mao said, "We do not refuse foreign aid but we rely chiefly on our own strength." He did not rule out accepting aid from friendly sources.'
>
> 'You cannot classify doing trade with a company like Shell as aid from a friendly source,' the interrogator said.
>
> 'For years Shell did not trade with Taiwan or maintain an office there. What could be more friendly to the People's Government than that?'[38]

Though the guards quote Chairman Mao's words or cite them as a guideline for their behaviour, apparently they do not understand the language in its subtleties. To the guards, the words are laws because they are from Mao, not because they understand them and intellectually agree.

The automatic repetition of the words of Chairman Mao reveals a population without the ability nor the habit of questioning what is handed down to them. The Cultural Revolution depends largely on the easy-to-remember language to influence the public because many of the people are still relatively uneducated.[39] And as can

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 290.

[39] Bobby Siu, *Women of China: Imperialism and Women's Resistance 1900-1949* (London: Zed

be seen, the power distribution in the Cultural Revolution also confirms this tendency to accommodate the un-educated farmers, workers and soldiers rather than the educated or the intellectuals, who are sent to remote areas to be re-educated by the examples of the mass through hard labour.

Nien Cheng, as a highly educated and resourceful woman, makes use of this crude nature of the slogans and tries to turn them to her advantage. Seeing that the odds are on the registering of a certain word or expression in the records, she becomes mindful of the least incriminating expressions and is always on the alert for any trap in language. When she is interrogated at the detention centre, the topic of Liu Shaoqi comes up and Cheng defends him:

> 'I did it from habit,' I said. 'For sixteen years, in the newspapers, in daily broadcasts and in books published by the government printing press, Chairman Liu ...' I paused when I caught sight of the interrogator glaring and saw the young worker stand up.[40]

Certainly she knows that Liu is in disgrace because the Party has decided to label him a traitor to Chairman Mao, and blames all sorts of counter-revolutionary crimes on him. Yet she refers to what Mao himself has said to defend her position:

> 'I found in Chairman Mao's books several complimentary references to Liu Shao-chi. It is so difficult to turn round now and think of him as totally bad. Perhaps he had just made a mistake. If that is the case, I hope Chairman Mao will forgive him. After all, they were close comrades for many years.'[41]

The very fact that his position changes so suddenly and dramatically points to some underhand dealings behind the backs of the citizens, though no ordinary citizens will

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Press, 1981) is a study of feminist endeavours from early 20th century China, towards the building of the People's Republic of China. He discovers in the course of his research that one reason of the success of the propaganda is the simplicity of the language used, so that even with a high degree of illiteracy, the main doctrines of the party can still be delivered and spread among the population. The same mechanism was also in operation during the Cultural Revolution.

[40] Nien Cheng (Nian Zheng), *Life and Death in Shanghai* (Flamingo: London, 1986), 278.

dare to say it. Cheng's statements of the facts are a way of pointing out the obvious and the self-evident logic which is hidden by the absurd argument and conclusion given by the propaganda and the guards.

Examples like the above abound in this long autobiographical narrative, all about the struggle between Nien Cheng and the Red Guards on the usage and meaning of certain phrases. Since thinking cannot do without an attachment to the sign system, the language,[42] we see throughout this discussion the central role of language and its transformations across different cultural groups and generations. What is seen in the verbal conflicts between Maxine and her mother, becomes here a redefinition of Mao's words for the Chinese. Nien Cheng's verbal repartee with her prosecutors is an upgraded daughter-mother conflict, an effort to free herself from the clutches of not an individual mother as some of the other narrators do, but from an overwhelming set of principles.

The various battles Nien Cheng fights not only reveal her position, but sharpen her will as she moves forward in her long struggle. In her record of these events, what is shown is the gradual affirmation of her individual voice as contradictory to what is laid down to be followed by the government. In a meeting with the guards, she is asked to read a Mao quotation and then asked whether she understands that. The quote is a warning from Mao about the possibility of

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[41] Ibid.

[42] In the control of language as the sole control of people's thinking process, the Cultural Revolution is quite similar to a fictional account of a totalitarian dictatorship. George Orwell's *1984* is an account of a desperate struggle between an individual Winston Smith, and the entire totalitarian system. One of the major methods of control exercised by the state over the individual is the control of words, implemented through the use of Newspeak, a new language which is much simpler than the existing language because of the continuous cutting of the vocabulary. Every edition of the dictionary is slimmer than the one before, and major words are cut so as to control the scope of people's thoughts, because language is seen as the medium for thought as well. In China, the emphasis on the simple slogans and sayings taken from Chairman Mao may have the same effects on the people because in a way the freedom of thought is curtailed by the limited flexibility of the

imperialists and KMT making trouble. Instead of merely noting what the Chairman has said, her analytical power comes into work as well:

> Obviously I could not very well say Mao was paranoid and over-suspicious. At the same time, I could not agree with what he said without implying some knowledge of such activities by the regime's enemies. So I answered diplomatically, 'Oh, I just believe every word of our Great Leader Chairman Mao, whatever it is. He's always correct, isn't he?'[43]

The quick-thinking, clear-minded and intelligent woman who has to balance the pros and cons for each move is apparent in this description. She has to challenge her opponents' definition of Mao's words at the same time as keeping her transgression within the boundary of acceptability so as not to get killed. This double discourse is the verbal manifestation of her individuation. The more closely she is asked to look at the slogans, the clearer she is of her own situation in relation to her country. This lethal game of words has changed into a belated individuation exercise for Nien Cheng.

To free herself, she has to understand the political machine in her motherland. In a way, this is similar to the psychological chess game played between Waverly and her mother who try desperately to understand each other. Cheng Nien is making an attempt to see the way her motherland is functioning now, and in this process of testing, adjustment and challenge, she treads on grounds which ultimately leaves an indelible mark on her, especially in the way she sees her relationship with China her motherland:

> Now that my departure was imminent, I felt terribly sad. I wanted to sort out the conflicting emotions in my mind through prayers and self-examination before embarking on a new chapter of my life.[44]

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slogans.

[43] Nien Cheng (Nian Zheng), *Life and Death in Shanghai* (Flamingo: London, 1986), 197.

[44] Ibid., 651.

She has decided to leave her motherland, but she is sad because being Chinese, she wants to stay here as the last stop of her life, just like fallen leaves returning to the root, forming a complete cycle. The tension between her desire to stay at "home" and her need to leave China demonstrates the complexity of relationship between the Chinese mother and the westernised daughter.

In her struggle with the Party, Cheng has shown resilience and firm determination, which have always been regarded as Chinese qualities. Her endurance is quite typical of Chinese women, because they are doubly underprivileged in the Chinese social hierarchy. There is however, another side to Cheng. Her belief that she should also fight back despite the possible failure may come from her Western education. If this recorded struggle is read as a psychological struggle between her and her mother culture, then her relationship with her mother (culture) is just like Ping-ying's with her mother. It is not the presence or absence of love which determines the daughter's location, but the degree of individuality she has achieved through an experience with her mother. Both Ping-ying and Nien Cheng leave because the proximity to their motherland will not accommodate their individuality.

The last sentence of the quote illustrates this intricate attachment to the mother very well. Cheng Nien chooses to go away from her motherland to a foreign place, but this is not a happy choice. She leaves not to sever her bond with the mother, but she needs time to mediate the nature of this relationship. She brought her Australian-born daughter back to her roots, yet that ends in the tragic death of the young woman and her own traumatic struggle. With this, her link with her mother(land) is no longer an unquestioning loving maternal bond. Cheng needs to think again ways of defining herself in relation to her mother culture, even at her

age. The Cultural Revolution, with its challenging stance to history, is destabilising Nien Cheng's bond with her mother culture, resulting in a need for distance to negotiate this attachment again.

In many ways *A Mother's Ordeal* is also a written negotiation of her relationship with her motherland by Chi An. It is not only a disagreement over the issue of having how many children, but a more fundamental disagreement in the understanding of human rights and the way one conceives oneself in relation to one's country. At the initial stage when Chi An and her husband Wen Xin try to go to U. S., it may be for a better life, but later when the fight between the Party and Chi An over her new pregnancy becomes critical, the issue reaches deeper into Chi An's pondering of her identity in relation to China. The result is a personal liberation from the merging with China, a separation from the motherland which grants her a voice to tell:

> But how could I help women still in China? I resolved to begin by telling my story to Steve, however painful that might be, so that he might write it.[45]

Which brings us to an interesting issue of authorship before going into the content of this collaborative writing. The book is penned by Steven Mosher, based on the story told by Chi An. Mosher is the one who initiates the writing of this story, struck by the uniqueness of Chi An's story even among the many women in China suffering a similar fate. The irony of Chi An's story, in Mosher's words, is:

> She had been bullied into signing a one-child agreement, yet had gone on to work as a population control enforcer. She had been both victimizer and victim and now faced victimization again.[46]

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[45] Steven W. Mosher, *A Mother's Ordeal: One Woman's Fight Against China's One-Child Policy* (London: Warner Books, 1993), 325.

[46] Ibid., author's note, xii.

The change of position makes Chi An a different victim, maybe all the more horrible because she knows exactly what it means when the same operations she is trained to perform on the others are prescribed to her. The experience of having been in a different position also makes it a more insightful encounter for Chi An because it is looking at life and death from the keeper and the taker's positions, which makes her think about her role as a mother as well as her mother culture.

The process of writing sheds light on relevant problems of identity. Mosher has a lot of interviews with Chi An, he takes the trouble to verify the public documents quoted, using parts of the real letters going among Chi An's family members and friends, the ultimate aim is to "present Chi An's story to the reader in as direct and unfiltered a way as possible,"[47] and so he uses the first person narrator in the book. His concern to make it as much Chi An's own story as possible is not unfounded, for it is quite clear that languages in different cultures differ not only in the sign system of reference, but they embody inherent thoughts and attitudes as well. Although Mosher is an experienced sinologist, the fact that this written book is a translation means that the language, together with the implication of the language, has to be taken critically and not accepted at face value.

Mosher's concern over the accuracy of the language can be better understood if both his and Chi An's positions are taken into consideration. Mosher is a foreigner to China, and his intervention can be seen as an unwelcome intrusion into national business. The situation is especially delicate as it involves the issue of life and death. The telling of Chi An's personal story will inevitably accelerate it into the revelation of a whole generation's story, as well as the attitude of a country towards its people at a certain time in history.

The title itself illustrates the extent of this personal story: *A Mother's Ordeal: One Woman's Fight Against China's One-Child Policy.* The personal story is woven into the political scenario. The generalisation is effective in getting across the extent of this struggle, for though motherhood is not everyone's experience, the position of a mother is universal enough for people to understand the emotional intensity involved. Biological motherhood is now put side by side with cultural motherhood, and shown to be under threat because of the policy making machine. China, with her One-Child policy, is portrayed as destroying the life of her people.

The irony of the title lies in the way these two kinds of motherhood stand in relation to life-giving and nurturing. From the desperate attempts of the individual women in Chi An's narrative to keep their babies against national policy, it can be seen the unique value and intensely personal meaning motherhood has for the women. Each baby is unique to the mother because of the physical connection between mothers and children. That is also the reason why even Chi An, an experienced nurse in the enforcement team of the One-Child policy, cannot get the image of the boy who refuses to die out of her mind.

The policy makes sense, however, as an aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, a massive deconstruction of the family unit and familial piety. During the ten-year period, families are separated and posted to different parts of the country, members are encouraged to tell on each other to stay out of personal danger, and most of the people are given so much work to occupy their time that the idea of familial lineage is practically put out of their mind. As Chi An remembers, one of the slogans they were asked to memorise in her youth is: "Father is dear, Mother is dear. But

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[47] Ibid., 42.

neither is as dear as Chairman Mao."[48] Youths are encouraged to place their loyalty in Chairman Mao rather than their flesh and blood. The Cultural revolution is indeed a revolution because it turns upside down the entire concept of family and ethics which is built upon the core of this central unit. In the introductory chapter of this dissertation, we have looked at how the family unit in traditional China has monitored the behaviour of its people according to the position they inhabit in the family hierarchy.

Mao Zedong has created a personal cult in his rule, and this cult has gradually taken over the kind of loyalty and devotion people used to give to their family. The change brought forth by his reign, especially at the height of the Cultural Revolution, is not dissimilar to the way Christianity works in Western civilisation. Mao has never posed as a deity, but the propaganda and the kind of devotion encouraged is nothing short of it. Even today, souvenirs with Mao's image are still collectors' items and bring forth a high price. The image of Chairman Mao as the helmsman of the revolution, and his position as having priority over one's parents break through the unity once held within a Chinese family.

To a culture whose idea of family is a total surrender of birthrights to the state, Chi An would rather have her daughter born an American than remain in China. As she murmurs to her baby girl the possibilities open to her in the foreign society, she says: "[you] should listen to your old parents, ... [even] if they do talk funny."[49] Chi An is referring to the expected language difference between her and her daughter because her daughter will grow up an American citizen, have an American education and speak American:

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[48] Ibid., 74.

[49] Ibid., 42.

> You will grow up dreaming in English, clapping your hands at garish Christmas trees, squealing for joy when you find funny-colored eggs at Easter, and dressing up like a ghost at Halloween and asking strangers for candy. You will grow up free and proud, doing what you want to do and not what the state decides.[50]

She would rather trade for the chance to stay as a family in a foreign place with the loss of a common language, because her own motherland, through the One-Child policy, has refused to mother them in the way she desires any more.

Chi An has chosen for her daughter a free life in America, away from the restrictive clutches of the motherland, because through this experience of her second motherhood, Chi An has come to a new stage of individuation of her own. Talking about the great famine in 1958-60, she says:

> Had Chairman Mao admitted that China faced a serious food shortage, I later realized, and asked for emergency assistance from international agencies, millions of lives could have been saved. Yet rather than reveal China's problems – and his own incompetence as leader – he tried to cover up the famine, in effect condemning many of his countrymen to a slow and agonizing death.[51]

Not only has she seen the true picture of the country, but she has come to analyse and form her own opinion about her country and its leader Mao. The family drama we have seen playing out between Ping-ying and her mother, and similarly between the American-born daughters and their Chinese mothers in the first chapter, has here taken the whole country as its setting. The family being shattered by the Cultural Revolution has re-emerged in the interaction between Chi An and her motherland.

The metaphorical upgrading of an individual family drama to a national scale can be seen in Chi An's application for approval to marry from her working unit. The idea of getting permission for marriage from her working unit, a social

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[50] Ibid., 334.

[51] Ibid., 39.

administrative body, is already revealing the change of the concept of family. Instead of the parents' approval, the unit representing the government is given the authority to decide on personal matters of this kind. The unit of the individual family has since disappeared as a centre of loyalty for people not only in their decision about marriage, but ironically in the issue of family planning as well.

As early as the time when she applies for marriage permission, Chi An is already asked about her plans not of having children, but of contraception. When she answers the official that she and Wei Xin have been thinking about contraception, in her mind she says, "I mean the exact opposite of what I said. It was having children that I daydreamed about, not years of barrenness."[52] This thought is not only disobedience to the party, but also a refusal to recognise the motherland's authority over what she wants to be. Motherhood is Chi An's experience of her new self. From the young woman who shouts slogans and who tries everything to get into the Red Guards, motherhood offers her a new dimension in understanding herself. Recalling the experience in the operation room when she gives birth to her first baby, she finally reveals to her husband the reason why she does not call out her pain: her worry "that a chemical anesthetic might hurt Tacheng."[53] She chooses to protect her baby from possible harm by anesthesia, at the expense of her comfort. Motherhood gives her responsibilities as well as a voice to speak of her own.[54]

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[52] Ibid., 146-47.

[53] Ibid., 197.

[54] The status of mothers may be different in different societies, but a comparative study will help to give perspectives to various representations. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (London: Picador, 1987) is a fictional narrative about life and struggles of slave women over their freedom, and a right to claim a link to their babies. The title of the book is the name of the baby killed by the mother, who wants to free her from the bondage to the slave masters. The fate of babies born from slaves is the same as their mothers because they are considered the properties of the slave master, as much as their parents

The sense of her independent self awakened in her through her marriage and motherhood is further strengthened, ironically, by the nature of her work. One night, a young woman close to term is brought to the hospital. As usual with cases like this, when the legitimacy of the pregnancy is not known, the doctors are instructed to abort the baby, even when it is carried to full term. In this case, the strong male baby of this young peasant woman refuses to die, and struggles for half an hour with the formaldehyde injected into his brain to kill him. The baby boy's stubborn fight with death opens her eyes to the nature of government policy, an exercise of control at the expense of human life.

Regard for the value of human life is also the reason why she is converted to Catholicism. At first she was cynical about religious beliefs:

> I had been force-fed Communism, which was virtually the state religion of the People's Republic, since I was old enough to talk. I was not about to submit myself to some new cult, however pleasant sounding its rules.[55]

Obviously her acquired individuation now repels any form of "force-fed" ideas, no matter what language that is dressed in. Besides, the suffering figure of Jesus Christ also intrigues her:

> *Who would want to kowtow before a defeated creature*, I thought, *unless he was not a mere creature at all but the Creator? But then why had he allowed himself to die?* It was almost beyond belief, certainly beyond the human imagination.[56]

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are, and the slave mother has no claim on the baby because she does not even possess herself. Putting this side by side with the experience of Chi An, as well as the other women mentioned in her narrative, what the Communist Party has done seems to be putting them back to the status of slaves because it is the control which gets taken away from the women. They no longer have the command over their bodies if they have to comply with what the Party tells them to do about having or not having babies, how many to have, and even when to have them.

[55] Steven W. Mosher, *A Mother's Ordeal: One Woman's Fight Against China's One-Child Policy* (London: Warner Books, 1993), 323.

[56] Ibid., 324.

The pain and torture experienced by the Catholic God, however, speaks a language Chi An understands:

> And I remembered my own abortion, and how I had writhed and screamed and cried. If this tortured figure was God, then surely he understood the pain and suffering that I had felt and caused.[57]

Chi An can identify with the God through the language of pain, just as labour pains ties her to her own mother again after years of rebellion. Motherhood acts as a catharsis for her into a renewal of her mother-daughter bond, whereas the state's control of birth alienates her.

Chi An's complicated link to her motherland may perhaps be seen in the name she and her husband choose for their American-born baby. They name her "Mei," the Chinese word for referring to America the country. Chi An says it is a "Chinese blessing bestowed on her birthplace,"[58] because it is a choice of foreign freedom made by the Chinese parents. The family structure having been replaced by central administration at home, Chi An leaves her motherland because motherhood has lost its value on this piece of land already. Her own biological status as a mother reconnects her to her own family circle, her mother, and shows her the importance of the family unit. Her choice to stay in the States is a final confirmation of the value of the family to her, and she would like to have it perpetuated even when it means she has to be away from home.

Similarly written by a Chinese woman already settled overseas, *Wild Swans* exhibits an equally, if not more, traumatic page of modern Chinese history and its impact on individual lives. Written more than ten years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, the book is a cross-generational narrative about the lives of

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[57] Ibid., 325.

three women across pages of Chinese history. Beginning with the grandmother's generation, when she is already an unusual figure because of her courage in life, through her mother, who has been deeply engaged in the whole mechanics of the Cultural Revolution, and ending with the narrator's fair share of struggle to get out of her motherland, *Wild Swans* is not only a depiction of the modern history of China, but more importantly a collaborative memory which is a proof of the strength mothers and daughters are bonded with each other through hardships and sufferings.

With a different focus, and a different underlying framework, the story of *Wild Swans* has a different rendering of the relationship with the native land. Ping-ying ends her narrative with a brave heart to receive the yet unknown future in Shanghai, far away from her tyrannical mother and the restrictive feudal Chinese concepts she represents; Cheng goes to the U. S., the supposed land of freedom with a broken heart and immeasurable sadness because she is disappointed with her motherland; while Chi An's tale ends with the joy of a new life in America and an aspiration for her new born daughter to be free from Chinese worries and sufferings. The three Chinese women's narratives examined up to now all end with a break with the past, be it a family, a nation's history, or a section of one's life. Although there is a gap between events of the past and the moment of recollection and writing, what is shown in the previous narratives is more than a natural time gap, but an active effort on the part of the narrators to put what is past behind themselves and focus on the future. To these women, contemporary China is too much pain to remember.

The difference with *Wild Swans* is that although the painful story goes back to pre-PRC days and stretches all the way to the end of the Cultural Revolution, the link with mother China has not been given up. Similar to Cheng and Chi An,

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[58] Ibid.

Chang Jung has already found a different life in another country, yet the ending note of the narrative is not alienation from China, but attention and concern. China may no longer be the home of Chang Jung, but through communicating with her mother and sister, Mainland China is still a reality to her. The shock people have over the Tiananmen Incident in 1989, for example, brings her memory back to the Cultural Revolution. Whether it is high-ranking party officials or lowly peasants, the element of fear has always been a part of their lives under Mao's regime because there is no stability to talk about and they have witnessed the overturning of a state of life too frequently over the decades. The end of Mao's domination brings a "dramatic diminution of fear."[59]

Having lived part of her life in the fearsome Mao era, Chang sees the Tiananmen Incident as a reminder to the people that fear has always been an element in the Chinese people's life:

> Fear made a tentative comeback, but without the all-pervasive and crushing force of the Maoist days. In political meetings today, people openly criticize Party leaders by name. The course of liberalization is irreversible. Yet Mao's face still stares down on Tiananmen Square.[60]

Fear is forgotten by the people because for very long they have not experienced any massive anxiety, but the narrator is aware of its inherent presence in the life in China. Although shocked by the killing involved in the June Fourth 1989 incident, commanded by the very person whom she regards as a liberator years ago; seeing that "Mao's face still stares down on Tiananmen Square,"[61] she does not see that as a totally unexpected outcome brought about by the demonstrators' transgressive act.

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[59] Jung Chang (Rong Zhang), *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (Flamingo: London, 1991), 675.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

From her comments on the recent development of her homeland, we can see that apart from the construction of a collaborative memory, the writings of *Wild Swans* is at the same time an attempt to straighten out her personal feelings about this place which has been her home for the first half of her life. In the Epilogue, Chang Jung writes:

> I have made London my home. For ten years, I avoided thinking about the China I had left behind. Then in 1988, my mother came to England to visit me. For the first time, she told me the story of her life and that of my grandmother. When she returned to Chengdu, I sat down and let my own memory surge out and the unshed tears flood my mind. I decided to write *Wild Swans*. The past was no longer too painful to recall because I had found love and fulfillment and therefore tranquillity.[62]

China has been put away for ten years since her life in England starts. One can guess that the reason for not opening her memories about this land is the same as those of Cheng's and Chi An's. It is simply too painful to remember and to live with. But with the visit of her mother, who has been her protector all her young life, and who in fact is the person making her departure for England possible, the link with China is reopened. The biological mother, who is the source of her physical life, reopens the connection between Chang Jung and her past with the native land.

It is important to notice that the act which initiates this writing is not merely the mother, but the story told about Chang's mother and grandmother. It is the completion of a lineage started two generations ago and carried on through modern China and contemporary England. What Bao Qin has brought to her daughter in London is an invisible line that stretches all the way back to Mainland China, a line which is not only about the past but gives meaning to the present as well. The subtitle of the book is "Three Daughters of China," her grandmother, her mother and

herself all go through life under Mainland Chinese rule. Their experiences, though different, together represent a development in the Chinese land, which in turn regulates individual feelings towards this motherland. The fact that she includes herself as one of the daughters of China shows that despite her distance from China, she still regards the Chinese as her cultural orientation.

Her story starts with her grandmother's life:

> At the age of fifteen my grandmother became the concubine of a warlord general, the police chief of a tenuous national government of China. The year was 1924 and China was in chaos.[63]

Different from *Autobiography of a Chinese Girl*, which begins with Ping-ying's own childhood, this beginning with the grandmother is very true to the subtitle of the book. The three daughters of China are conceived as a continuation beginning with the grandmother, for each life has meaning side by side with the others. Apart from this common origin of the women, their marriages are also taken as a way to represent the change of life in general. Great-grandfather arranged for his daughter to be the concubine of a powerful warlord as was accepted at the time; when it was the mother's turn to marry, she made her own choice; the narrator was twenty-five and still not engaged, rather an unusual condition for people at that time but still she was under no pressure to be married. This difference among the daughters of China illustrates a change in social acceptance as well as cultural values at various times in history.

When her grandmother was sent away to be a concubine:

> My grandmother bent her head and wept. She hated the idea of being a concubine, but her father had already made the decision, and it was unthinkable to oppose one's parents. To question a parental decision was

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[62] Ibid., 673.

[63] Ibid., 27.

considered 'unfilial' – and to be unfilial was tantamount to treason.[64]

Seen from today, at the end of the twentieth century, in many Chinese societies, that kind of arranged marriage is outrageous, but in the depiction of the grandmother's response, only the fact that she hates it is mentioned. Grandmother lowers her head and cries, but that is about the only defense she puts up, if that can be considered a defense at all. Her grandmother accepts her fate because she has not been taught any other way. Her mother and the narrator herself act otherwise because they are open to more possibilities, one of which is to believe in their rights to take life into their own hands.

Women's responses to their environment are tied to the possibilities given to them at their times. The mother (land) exercises her power over her daughters differently through the shaping of social permissions. Putting together the life stories of different generations yields a meaningful picture of the motherland. In her youth, Bao Qin belongs to the Women's Federation, an organization which claims to help women out of feudal restrictions imposed on them. Paradoxical to the supposed aim of the organization, this is the narrator's description of it:

> [It is] an institution wholly under the control of the Party, to which everyone in the urban areas had to belong and which regulated virtually every aspect of an employee's life like in an army. My mother was supposed to live on the premises of the Federation, and had to obtain its permission to marry.[65]

If it has indeed liberated women like Chang's grandmother from the oppression of being assigned as concubines, and informing them of their rights as a human being, then it has only done so by replacing one kind of oppression with another. Just like Chi An, while in the past daughters had to follow the parents' decision in marriage,

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[64] Ibid., 39.

[65] Ibid., 173.

now they have to ask the Women's Federation for permission.

Bao Qin, Chang's mother, is confused by the nature of this organization. When she inquired about the scope of affairs for which she needs to obtain permission, the answer she gets is "anything." To Chang, the confusion of her mother in her youth over this self-contradictory organization assumes a new meaning in hindsight:

> The need to obtain authorization for an unspecified 'anything' was to become a fundamental element in Chinese Communist role. It also meant that people learned not to take any action on their own initiative.[66]

It is what the Chinese government wants to instill into her people, and it is also one of the major reasons why the Cultural Revolution is possible, when it obviously involves so much destruction to property and human life. The "anything" from the official symbolises the total control the government tries to assume over different aspects of the people's life. This is a repetition of the upgraded family drama we see played out in Chi An's and Cheng's cases.

This is a very important discovery, perhaps not for the young Bao Qin at that time because she was still too much under the influence of the Party and had not enough belief in herself, but it is certainly important to Chang Jung who is now capable of viewing these events of her foremothers with a critical distance, both in time and space. She knows that her mother:

> had always trusted her own strong sense of right and wrong, but this now seemed to be in conflict with the views of her 'cause' and, often, the judgment of her husband, whom she loved. She began to doubt herself for the first time.[67]

The conflict between the individual sense of right and wrong, and the instruction

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[66] Ibid., 184.

[67] Ibid., 185.

from the Party bring doubt, which is one important element the Party counts on to manipulate people. Juxtaposing this situation of the individual doubt over oneself with the event of grandmother's assigned marriage, an important outline of development can be deduced. Before the PRC, the feudal spirit took control of the Chinese people and individual expression was kept out of the proper code of behaviour, with the PRC, the individual is still not given full control over themselves, though the restrictions over expression of discontent is not as strict as before the liberation.

Two generations, two different political epochs, but basically the ultimate control over the individuals is still in the hands of the political machine, with different names only. For Chang Jung, looking back, her life is again another continuation of this political machine:

> Like many Chinese, I was incapable of rational thinking in those days. We were so cowed and contorted by fear and indoctrination that to deviate from the path laid down by Mao would have been inconceivable. Besides, we had been overwhelmed by deceptive rhetoric, disinformation, and hypocrisy, which made it virtually impossible to see through the situation and to form an intelligent judgment.[68]

The importance of a record of these events in the grandmother, the mother, as well as the daughter's subordination to the higher political or cultural authority lies exactly with its voicing. The mere fact that Chang Jung the narrator can put these events into a coherent narrative stretching across decades of Chinese history already illustrates a crossover from ignorance to knowledge, for it is understanding which voices out the relationship among these three generations of life. The pointing out of this inability to think in the past is an attempt to situate the present. The charting of these points of history shows the process of looking into her motherland's past to

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[68] Ibid., 404.

find the origin of herself.

Incidents showing this enlightenment in hindsight abounds in the narrative:

> Once, in a pharmacy in Chengdu, an old shop assistant with a pair of impassive eyes behind gray-rimmed spectacles murmured without looking at me, 'When sailing the seas we need a helmsman ...' There was a pregnant pause. It took me a moment to realize I was supposed to complete the sentence, which was a fawning quotation from Lin Biao about Mao. Such exchanges has just been enforced as a standard greeting. I had to mumble, 'When making revolution we need Mao Zedong thought.'[69]

In fact, the verbal feature and the special rhetoric all the way through the Cultural Revolution is mentioned not only here, but noticed by the other writers talking about the same collective experience. Yet again, the choice of this incident, and the gap between the ignorant Chang Jung who needed time to understand what to say, and the enlightened narrator who could choose this incident as an illustration of the degree of indoctrination at the time, is another example of the present self in an engagement with the past. Obviously, no matter how meticulous an autobiography is, choice has to be exercised in the kinds of details to include, which in turn will shape the approach of the narrator in relation to these chosen incidents. Like the narrator in *A Mother's Ordeal*, the narrator of *Wild Swans* does not merely retell the experiences of her foremothers, but engages actively with the narration, adjusting her standpoint in accordance to these events.

As a result of this natural progression of understanding, the farther away from her naïve youth, the more sharply her individuation comes into focus. After that incident of the rhetoric repartee in the pharmacy, the narrator mentions another incident, which shows the beginning of her enlightenment in thoughts. Her brother, Jin-ming, is said to be skeptical, often capable of humorous and ironic remarks about the situation they are in. Looking back, she realises that:

> Mao, hypocritically calling for 'rebellion,' wanted no genuine inquiry or skepticism. To be able to think in a skeptical way was my first step toward enlightenment.[70]

Here, the progress to enlightenment is clearly defined for the first time, as beginning with the acquisition of a sense of humour over the understanding of their situation. With the knowledge and clarity of recollection, what may only be a humble enjoyment amidst daily inconvenience and trouble stands out clearly at present as the initiation of a gradual process of self-awareness which continues till the moment of writing.

Once started, this journey of enlightenment continues, cumulating in the moment of climax when Mao Zedong, seen as the person who is solely responsible for the suffering and loss concerning millions, dies in September 1976. Chang's record of her feelings makes no mistake about her ability to judge for herself:

> The news filled me with such euphoria that for an instant I was numb. My ingrained self-censorship immediately started working: I registered the fact that there was an orgy of weeping going on around me, and that I had to come up with some suitable performance.[71]

Her feelings of euphoria show her critical judgement, for despite her outward behaviour, inside she is quite sure where the responsibility of all those human sufferings lies, but then at the same time she has learnt the game so well that she knows immediately that the programmed behaviour should be let out for appearance's sake. This moment of realization has condensed multiple wisdom in the narrator's life: judgment and diplomatic behaviour as well as the clear-sighted cynicism to see the entire collective behaviour as a gigantic performance. By this

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[69] Ibid., 531.

[70] Ibid., 532.

[71] Ibid., 658.

time, the end of the Cultural Revolution, China the motherland has already transformed her youngest daughter of the three into a woman of her own; by the inclusion of this moment, Chang Jung the narrator is charting her own development by the construction of the mother-daughter narrative.

The death of Mao Zedong means to her not only a possibly better life, but a deeper understanding of the government she has born into, as well as the nature of the people her fellow comrades. Analysing the rule of Mao, Chang comes to this conclusion:

> He understood ugly human instincts such as envy and resentment, and knew how to mobilize them for his ends. He ruled by getting people to hate each other.[72]

In an age when Maoism dominates China, understanding the thinking of Mao is an enormous step in getting to know the nature of the people under him. To be able to analyse this power which has been penetrating the population to such an extent, Chang has shown an extraordinary insight into and emotional detachment from the mass. These qualities in turn initiate the individuation of an independent being who is capable of drawing the line between what is expected of her and what she herself wants.

The result of meditation after Mao's death goes beyond the immediate trauma of modern China. The understanding of Mao's principle or rule enables her to link the immediate to the past. She writes:

> Because of his own deep resentment of formal education and the educated, because of his megalomania, which led to his scorn for the great figures of Chinese civilization that he did not understand, such as architecture, art, and music, Mao destroyed much of the country's cultural heritage. He left behind not only a brutalized nation, but also an ugly land with little of its past glory remaining or appreciated.[73]

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[72] Ibid., 659.

[73] Ibid.

This is not only an evaluation of Mao and his almost three decades of rule, it shows an appreciation of a China before the appearance of Mao, a China whose glory has been transformed into something ugly because of Mao's leadership. Although there is no in-depth assessment of what that past glory is, the juxtaposition of pre- and post-Maoist China puts up the picture of China as an extended life, each era changing its face because of the change in leadership.

Chang Jung's physical distance away from China is by no means a break from her motherland as Cheng's and Chi An's exiles have been. While *Life and Death in Shanghai* and *A Mother's Ordeal* can be seen as writing off the maternal bond with China, *Wild Swans* is more a negotiation and finally a recovery of this link. For Chang has already put aside her past for ten years, being happy with her new life in London. Her mother's revelation of her own and her mother's stories urge Chang to re-establish this link in the form of this book. The last detail of the book, seemingly unrelated, is her mother seeing a former Kuomintang official walking out from a hotel in the Mainland, surrounded by a flattering crowd because of his wealth. This is a wonderful moment to end the narrative, because everything is so different and yet everything has found its right position. Her mother's name has been cleared and she is walking free, this former official is now showing off his wealth from Taiwan, and yet the Chinese crowd is around him. China has stepped into yet another phase of her life, and Chang the daughter is still amazed with the link to her mother(land).

The end of *Wild Swans* presents an ambiguous picture of the attitude the narrator has for her motherland because of this resumed link with China. She has put the history aside for ten years, because that is a history of destruction of familial relationship. Yet all these years her mother has been living there, finally enabling

this resumption of connection between the narrator and the culture. There is a subtle push and pull between the force of origin and the elimination of this link. *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots*,[74] however, takes a completely different approach to the relationship between the individual narrator and the long-departed motherland. The subtitle of this book is: "The True Story of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter," and it is easy to read this as another kind of home-coming, parallel to Hong Kong's reunification with China. Read at different levels, this family saga which originates in Shanghai before the establishment of the PRC can support quite a few interpretations of its hidden message.

If viewed as the narrative of an unwanted Chinese daughter, it is certainly a record of the personal struggle undertaken by the neglected individual who has been working hard for acceptance by her family at home. The double meaning of the word "home" is obvious. Unable to feel at home in the house, China is not a place of accommodation to her either. It is also a tale about an exiled Chinese woman who endures hardship in her life just hoping to be welcomed by the place she regards as homeland. The date of its publication, which is also the year of Hong Kong's return to China, may also denote a similar yearning to be a part of China again just like this piece of land given to the British earlier. Passages in the narrative show that the narrator is aware of the link between Hong Kong and Mainland China, and the impact of 1997 approaching is also lightly mentioned in the text. It should not be too out of the way to say that there is a link between her portrait of herself juxtaposed with the status of Hong Kong, Hong Kong being the place of her family settlement for such a long time.

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[74] Adeline Yen Mah, *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots: The True Story of An Unwanted Chinese Daughter* (Penguin: London, 1997).

The entire drama of Adeline's life and the concept of home evolve around the moment of her birth. Or more accurately, two weeks after her birth, when her mother died from puerperal fever. On her deathbed, Adeline's mother asked Aunt Baba to look after Adeline who was orphaned. Adeline is doubly unfortunate, the loss of her mother is already a misfortune, but to have a stepmother who is as possessive and thirsty for power and control as Jeanne is an added tragedy, for Jeanne cares for almost nothing but herself. After Jeanne's marriage to Adeline's father, Adeline's life came under exploitation and sometimes inhuman oppression. Throughout her childhood, even well into her adulthood, Adeline is constantly conscious of being neglected, and her life's effort is mainly concentrated on getting approval from her family, to prove to herself that she is worth loving, just as Shelly Philips has said.

One of the unfailing efforts Adeline makes is in her academic performance, encouraged by Aunt Baba. While Aunt Baba understands it as a means to obtain a decent job and ultimate self-dependence and freedom, Adeline does it to get approval from her family:

> Nothing I did ever seemed to please Father, Niang, or any of my siblings. But I never ceased to believe that if I tried hard enough, one day Father, Niang and everyone in my family would be proud of me.[75]

It is here that we see the origin of her life's actions, to excel in school to get a good job, to marry a good husband, all this excellence in different aspects is only to get her family to be proud of her. For she observes:

> Girls were a cheap commodity in China. Unwanted daughters were peddled as virtual slaves, sometimes by brokers, to unknown families. Once sold, a child's destiny was at the whim of her buyer. She had no papers and no rights.[76]

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[75] Ibid., 60.

[76] Ibid., 100.

It seems that she has to earn her worth of existence, moreover the right to belong to a family.

The battle for the right of belonging is a hard one. Incidents about unfair treatment by her stepmother fill the narrative. The children were given the bare minimum for their upkeep, and any social contact with other schoolmates was forbidden. Children were separated into groups, with different status, and grandfather and Aunt Baba were stopped from helping them financially. Although Jeanne gave much more care to her own children than to her stepchildren in general, Adeline seemed to be the one singled out for venting her anger and hatred. Being the cause of her mother's death seems to have deprived her of care.

In Adeline's narrative, her childhood is like a power struggle between her Aunt Baba and stepmother Jeanne. On the surface they are a family and sometimes courtesy is still maintained at a very superficial level, but inside, the two sides are thinking of ways to get the better of each other. While Jeanne neglected her stepchildren, Aunt Baba paid particular attention to Adeline:

> Aunt Baba was always like a mother to me. Now we drew even closer. She paid the greatest attention to everything about me: my appearance, my health and my personality. Most of all, she cared about my education, probably mindful of the fact that her own had been curtailed.[77]

Aunt Baba treated her as a daughter. Apart from taking care of her personal and intellectual development, her attention over Adeline's academic performance was especially noted in the narrative. This is an important aspect of Aunt Baba's love for her because excellence in academic performance will give her freedom, which she needs most. Moreover, this love is not just the love of a senior shown to a junior member of the same family, for Aunt Baba was actually treating Adeline as a

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[77] Ibid., 60.

continuation of herself because her own education was curtailed. She hoped Adeline would finish what she had not, as sometimes is the wish of a mother for her daughter.

This sense of a continuation between Aunt Baba and Adeline is best seen in the narrator's own introduction of the story of her life:

> *Luo ye gui gen* (falling leaves return to their roots). My roots were from a Shanghai family headed by my affluent father and his beautiful Eurasian wife, set against a background of treaty ports carved into foreign concessions, and the collision of East and West played out within and without my very own home.[78]

She is returning to her roots in Shanghai at the end of the narrative, and significantly, what she returns to is not the stepmother, but her aunt, who has been a mother to her all through her youth. The parallel between the East and West, and her familial drama in the middle of it is well set, for not only is Shanghai the city of intercultural exchange, but her family is also a site harbouring the same collision between East and West. Jeanne's entry into the family disrupts the routine as well as the network of feelings members have for one another, causing chaos and decomposition of the basic family structure. Gradually the siblings are put against each other so that the filial emotions are eroded.

For Adeline the narrator, the result of this foreign intrusion is a loss of foothold in establishing a sense of orientation. She has never seen her mother, all her life she is neglected and exploited by Jeanne while Aunt Baba is doing her best to mother her. Adeline would be a perfect example of what Chodorow has theorised in *The Reproduction of Mothering*, for lacking the core sense of attachment, she is incapable of reproducing herself and others. Without a role model, Adeline has no channel to receive the transferral of desire to mother, as the case is shown by

Chodorow. The essential urge to reproduce oneself in one's offspring is missing in Adeline because she herself is unformed. She has tried all her life to gain approval because she needs people to affirm her existence.

The choice of the title, and the format of the narrative are apt to illustrate her life-long search. It is a long journey that Adeline has embarked on, starting from the day when she was born, because that was when she lost her foothold. Her psychological journey is a search for the mother object, which will provide her the sense of completeness by the affirmation of their closeness. That Adeline has not understood. Years later when she is already married and well-settled in the States, her relationship with Jeanne seems to change for the better, and she has this dream:

> I yearned to have a heart-to-heart conversation with her and fantasized about a soul-searching *rapprochement* at her sickbed where everything would be explained and she would die peacefully, surrounded by my loving family.[79]

It is the ultimate dream, indeed ultimate illusion of her life. Although she has been mistreated in her childhood, and although she has success despite her stepmother, in her adulthood there is still this missing piece of security she dreams of claiming from her, because she has taken the place of her mother.

Unfortunately, this life-long wish is finally denied, revealed to be naïve and unwelcome. Jeanne's will reveals that she has never liked Adeline, never changed her mind, despite her seemingly better behaviour towards her. Jeanne has proved herself a most self-centred woman willing to go into any length to crush her opponents, as can be seen in the final act of distribution of her wealth. Her own daughter Susan is kept out of it altogether; for Adeline, it is even worse. Not only is she kept out of it, but Jeanne hides the original will of her husband, in which a

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[78] Ibid., 3.

[79] Ibid., 248.

share is given to Adeline. The event of its discovery will lead to a horrible fight among the children for the wealth, and this may be what she has in mind finally. When Adeline has her father's will in hand, she suddenly sees everything, that:

> Niang must have resented this special bond between us. In the end, seeking to destroy it, she had baited James into participating in a fraud he detested. Nothing would have pleased her more than to see the two of us at each other's throats, fighting over her legacy.[80]

To Adeline, this is the moment of enlightenment, for she finally understands that it is only her wishful thinking all those years to try to impress her stepmother enough to make a mother of her. When she says to her brother, "*San ge!* (Third Elder Brother)! It was a great misfortune for us to have had Niang for a stepmother. Don't worry, I won't contest her will. I will never allow her to triumph over me,"[81] it is already a proclamation of her own awakening. Her stepmother will never be a mother to her as she wishes, and her vain attempts to please her mean nothing to the woman. Adeline's promise of not contesting her will is in turn an admission of defeat in trying to make her a mother, but on the other hand a reclaiming of her own individuality. She can finally stand up for herself in contrast to Jeanne's desires, and does what she herself wants without asking for others' approval.

The gaining of this independence spells the final stop of her journey. She receives a letter from her Aunt Baba in Shanghai asking her to go and see her for the last time. To Adeline, Shanghai is literally her roots because she was born there, and Aunt Baba is psychologically her roots because she has taken care of her as much as she could, and encouraged her to be a woman of her own. The moment Adeline steps into the old house in Shanghai, she embraces her aunt "and all [her]

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[80] Ibid., 270.

[81] Ibid.

beginnings."[82] At this point, her journey's end, she is free from the burden of a wrongly assumed desire of approval, and is able to see clearly where she starts off. The story called "The Incurable Wound," told by her Aunt Baba about a talented painter, sums up the journey of Adeline's search for herself:

> despite the administration of innumerable poultices prescribed by the best doctors in China, Ling-ling's wound would not heal. She continued to paint superbly until her death at a ripe old age.[83]

The wound is a symbol of Adeline's loss of her mother. Since it is impossible to bring her mother to life again, the best that she can do is to accept that lack and make the best of it. The struggle in her academic performance, encouraged by her Aunt Baba is the embodiment of this spirit to "prevail in every battle, overcome each adversity,"[84] and Adeline has proved herself capable of overcoming all her hardships, finally arriving at an understanding of what her aunt has seen all those years back. At her aunt's deathbed, Adeline feels "a wave of repose, a peaceful serenity,"[85] for the independent, self-aware Adeline has come back to where her roots are, and Aunt Baba has completed the mission given to her by Adeline's mother.

In Adeline's life journey, we may see not only an individual experience in a particular place and time. As she has pointed out, her family is the site of contest between different forces. The absence of her mother, and the neglect of her stepmother construct a space where the daughter has nowhere to turn, and no guiding hands to trust. The family, parents and siblings no longer exist as a core

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[82] Ibid., 272.

[83] Ibid., 273.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid., 274.

which hold people together, and in the case of Adeline, she is orphaned twice over. This scenario reminds us of the destruction of the nuclear family resulting from the Cultural Revolution, when the individuals are left to fare for themselves, to survive on their own. It may be interesting to ask whether there is a link to this need to survive and the remarkable continuation Modern China has managed to sustain.

A similar trailing sense of continuation can be found in *Shijie shang zui tengwo de na ge ren qu le*,[86] an elegy written in a diary form. Zhang Jie, the narrator, makes an almost day to day record of the final days of her mother, hoping to show it to her own daughter Tang Di, when she comes back from the States:

> This hurry is to have the words ready for her when she returns. She is another flesh and blood of ma, she has the right to know every detail. I place my hope on to these hundred thousand words, to be clearer and more inclusive than my spoken narration.[87]

In this professed aim of finishing the story, we can see the close link among the women of three generations. The old lady died in the absence of Tang Di, therefore Zhang wishes to use the record of this incident to fill the gap left by her absence, symbolically completing the line of heritage formed by these three women.

The grandmother-mother-granddaughter bond is the one line of connection running throughout this text of old age and death. Although Tang Di is the granddaughter, she is regarded as another "flesh and blood" of the grandmother, because she is also raised by the same old hands. In this memorial narrative, details confirming this three-generation link is seen frequently, not only from the narrator's point of view, but from the old lady's as well:

Because of the operation, ma had a blood test, it was then that we discovered

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[86] Jie Zhang 張潔, *Shijie shang zui tengwo de na ge ren qu le* 世界上最疼我的那個人去了 [The One Who Loves Me the Most Is Gone] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1994).

[87] Ibid., 214.

> ma was also blood type O.
>
> I heard her mumbling to herself a few times, "we are all blood type O."
>
> Mumbling to herself.
>
> She was slowly mincing this proof. This obviously consoled her enormously. Finally she found something to share with her much-proud-of daughter and granddaughter; and this much welcome proof that we are really her flesh and blood.[88]

Not only is she proud of sharing the same blood type with her daughter and granddaughter, this is also an incident of which Zhang Jie feels proud. This sharing of blood type not only symbolically reinforces the tie they have with each other, but physically it is also a sharing. Asking the doctor to use her blood for her mother is an act of sacrifice and love on Zhang Jie's part: she is letting her mother take blood from her body, a kind of nurturing, the reverse of what her mother had done for her when she was a baby. The responses to each other physically is both an illustration and a reinforcement of the merging of their identities.

When Zhang had to break the bad news to Tang Di who called from the States, she found that apart from the news she could not make herself say anything more:

> Would like to say some more to Tang Di, but my husband was sitting on the sofa right behind me. Not that there was anything secret from him, but the words, did they not belong only to my ma, her grandmother?[89]

Her inability here to say anything more in front of her husband reveals the intense intimacy the three women share with each other, despite the gap of age and distance. The maternal bond between mother and daughter has been given prime importance over all other liaison, and physical contact with the mother is also the most touching:

> In my life I have loved, and have been embraced to the heart by men, but I have never been touched as when caressed by mother ... nor ever felt the same welcome to it one day to another, like a mother's touch...[90]

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[88] Ibid., 72.

[89] Ibid., 202.

[90] Ibid., 133.

The comparison between contact with men and with her own mother illustrates not only that she enjoys the maternal intimacy, but also a psychological regression to the childhood stage.

The physical contact embodies an agenda of social and psychological status. Embrace of men puts her in the position of a mature and individual woman, a mother's caress, however, situates her back in the stage when she is under the protection of the maternal care. One's relationship with the mother is the first one and that is the most intimate attachment, for the baby has literally been inside the mother. With the presence of the mother, the child feels safe because she is literally its home, its origin and its source to be. The power of this certainty of orientation is only too clear in the various texts we have looked at from different chapters. Daughters of different ages refer to the stories of their origin to seek a sense of security when they encounter crises, and their origin is the story shared with the mother.

With the realisation of this inseparable connection between mother and daughter, the narrative is full of jealous remembrance of small events in the last days of her mother's life. Since the book is written with the knowledge of the outcome, this jealous remembrance is often filled with an equally intensive self-accusation of negligence and carelessness towards the care of the mother now and past. Even the beginning of the narrative already carries this laden description:

> At the end of July, 1991, ma aged suddenly, her body collapsed into bits and pieces at a call. It is like the day before she had still been fine, the next day she fell, there was not even a gradual process.
> And ma might have a premonition.[91]

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[91] Ibid., 1.

The significance of this opening lies not in the validity of her speculation, but in her guilt of not providing adequate care to her aged mother. In her sad remembrance of this experience, every detail that comes to mind assumes a possible hint for her to decode and save her mother's life in time.

Even acts which were performed with goodwill caused doubt in this reconstruction of her last days with her mother, as to whether they were culprits in disguise. The night before her mother's death, Zhang Jie had cooked some congee for her mother:

> The congee was ready, ma had taken a big bowl. She said, 'I like this.' I immediately went to get her another half-bowl, picking deliberately the most nutritious lotus seed and herbs.
>
> Is this one and a half bowl of congee the reason for her zhan wang? If she did not have this would she be able to overcome this test of life?[92]

No one can comment on this possibility, but clearly the narrator is in a paranoid condition, because the death of her mother reveals to her all the more clearly that her life, and her daughter's life, are closely embodied in her mother's aging existence. Though she is already a middle-aged woman with a grown-up daughter, the loss of her mother takes from her an important element of herself, the core of her sense of security.

The importance of her mother as a refuge to her desire for security can be deduced from her responses to different stages of her mother's decline. When one moment her mother crawled on the floor instead of trying to walk as she demanded, her response was first numbness, then fury, for she interpreted her mother's behaviour as giving up the struggle for life, in turn a betrayal of her love. At that moment the narrator hates her mother for not cooperating in this joint struggle against death:

> My great love suddenly turned into great hate.
> I hated ma's psychological barrier;
> I hated her stubbornness. Her stubbornness was not only her enemy, but was mine too;
> I hated her refusal and inability to cooperate with me, to fight the approaching deterioration of her brain, to fight against death.[93]

This hate turns into fear, the fear of her mother choosing the ease of giving up in the face of the hardships of struggle. Zhang Jie confesses that her desire for her mother's survival may even be stronger than her own. Her desire for her mother's continual life can be a demonstration of her own need of support, as can be seen from the inseparable life they have been living.

In life the three women are inseparable, and in death this maternal bond is also continued. In preparation for cremation, Zhang looked for something belonging to Tang Di or a photo of her, so her mother could "bring" that along:

> I do not know how I remembered a photo of ma and Tang Di, taken in 1990 when we were at ROB's having barbecue. The fact that I could remember this kind of inconsequent triviality, and be able to find the photo, was a sign of help from the higher power, indeed a fulfilment of ma's wish.
> The figure in the photo is small, but I think this is ma's biggest treasure.[94]

So the missing piece in the three-women bond is carried to the other side of the world, completing the picture of their interrelationship over the boundary of life and death. In fact for Zhang Jie, the writing of this narrative is itself a token of her remembrance of her mother:

> All the time she has departed, I have been thinking. I know in the rest of my days, this will be my most important mission, and also, her tragic life.[95]

These are heavy words to write. Remembrances of the dead mother becomes an

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[92] Ibid., 178.

[93] Ibid., 158.

[94] Ibid., 189.

[95] Ibid., 150.

important mission of the daughter, and the past is firmly brought along to continue the present.

This collection of memory, and the record of the last days of her mother, can be seen as an attempt to substitute the mother who is now not present anymore. The text is a symbol of the mother's body, for it occupies the mind of the narrator in the immediate days of her bereavement. Mother's body is translated into a text of the mother, and what the narrator can no longer do with the mother in person, she has to resort to the substitute, the text: "One day I suddenly realised even if I were to write another year, it would still be imperfect."[96] This will never be complete although the person is already dead, because the narrator has displaced her living emotions to the writing of the text.

An important transformation in the narrator occurs, however, in the process of this writing, when she realises:

> One's life is actually a process of losing those he loves, moreover an eternal loss. This is the greatest pain everyone has to go through.
>
> After this change, I am not the same person. What the new me will be like, I can hardly predict. Ma, you cannot have known, but you have created for me another life.[97]

The narrator recognises a pattern of life from her loss. This recognition gives her a new perspective to look at herself, making her a new person. I say this is a transformation because she has come out of the regressive indulgence in the memory of her mother into a new person whom even she cannot predict. The importance lies in her acceptance of this unpredictability. Zhang Jie's intense attachment to her mother, as seen by the collection of events she repeats about them, is a manifestation of her need for orientation and security. Now in the course of the

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[96] Ibid., 215.

[97] Ibid., 212.

writing she sees a newly created self, a self which does not have the same sense of fear, instead celebrates what she calls "another life."

The ability to translate her attachment to her mother physically into a verbal mastery of a narrative is the accomplishment of her individuation. It is a change from passively reading the text on the mother's body into an active creator of a narrative embodying the mother. A similar transformation has been seen in Maxine when she takes over her mother's ability to "talk-story," in Jing-mei when she tells her part of the narrative in place of her mother, in the distinct exclusion of the mother figure in contemporary Hong Kong women's writing, and in the struggle the Taiwan women writers put up in pondering their link to the mother culture, not being able to give a conclusion. The production of a text is proof that the daughter has successfully incorporated her mother's life into her own.

Having started at the pre-PRC era, all the way to contemporary China, the several female Chinese writers looked at here show quite different responses in their confrontation with the long history of their motherland. While Chinese communities elsewhere, like the overseas American Chinese, the Hong Kong Chinese, and the Taiwan Chinese, have difficulties in resolving their identities in relation to the faraway legacy of the Mainland Chinese culture, the daughters of China born and raised in their native land have another kind of obstacle in facing themselves. China with its more than five thousand years of story is not a uniform entity, and is changing according to the international and regional political recognition at different eras. These changes inevitably affect the lives of the individual citizens on how they perceive themselves and relate themselves to the land where they were born.

As a result, we find different responses to recent Chinese history. Ping-ying

braces herself to face the challenge of new China by joining the army in the frontline, leaving her family, especially the control of her mother, who is a strict keeper of the feudal rules and proprieties. Cheng is disappointed with her motherland and resolves to depart from the land which takes away her daughter from her. Her departure makes it clear that she is going to break from her motherland because of her new insight. Chi An and her husband would have nothing to do with the Mainland again and their determination to have this severance can be reflected in the name of their American daughter. These Chinese women cannot accept the loss caused by their Motherland because they expect something different.

Yet contemporary Chinese history is not a totally negative experience. Chang Jung's *Wild Swans* still keeps an open mind towards the link with this huge piece of land though she is miles away. The transformation in China under the new economic system brings new hopes to people disappointed in the past. And finally, in the last two narratives with the death of the mother, the narrators find new selves and flourish with the support of the mother or mother surrogate. Adeline has been separated from her motherland almost half of her life, and ends up finding her source of support where she starts. Zhang Jie mourns for her aged mother and discovers new possibilities in her own life doing that. The old mother, and the old motherland has not been written off as outdated, instead daughters of China still refer to her for inspiration and sustenance.

## Conclusion

This study set out to examine the cultural links between different Chinese communities in late 20th century women's writing. Works of overseas Chinese, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Mainland examined here represent in an interesting perspective the way mothers and daughters understand their identity in relation to one another. Situating these cultural groups in their social, political and historical contexts, the push and pull, love and hate, converging and diverging forces shaping the outcome of the mother-daughter bonds are also reflected in the network of various Chinese communities. The mother-daughter framework gives new life to the study of Chinese women's self-representation because it opens other perspectives of looking at the meaning of modern Chinese-ness.

The mothers' relationship to daughters is chosen as the primary complex to be explored, for very specific reasons. Chinese culture is one of the most ancient civilisations still surviving. In the course of its long history, there have been threats, and invasions leaving indelible marks on the surviving culture. There have been changes in political realities, cutting groups of Chinese people off from their motherland. Instead of a clean break, there exists a subtle connection between American-Chinese, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and modern Mainland women, promising a new way of defining a Chinese identity.

Chinese identity has been shown as going through phases of transformation. Ancient Chinese life has very different patterns of organisation from that of Western life, and that forms a basic habit of thinking and understanding oneself in the collective unconscious of the Chinese people. Increased contact with the West forces open the doors of China's closed system to admit contamination both in life

style and ways of thinking. The scope of this study has covered political and cultural realities of the consequence of Western influence. In the modern writing of these four communities, the concept of a Chinese identity is represented as the combined result of an ancient Chinese legacy and distinctive Westernisation.

National identity has been an area of interested exploration by comparatists. Chinese identity, whose various compositions have been illustrated with reference to the women's texts here, proves to be a fruitful subject for further investigation because of its extra resilience and coverage throughout the world. As seen in the narratives, Chinese-ness not only survives in the face of challenges from other cultural forces, it is dynamically interacting with these external powers in engendering new identities. The four main chapters have been illustrations of such engendering.

Identity conflicts between the Chinese-emigrated mothers and American-born daughters mean more than a failure of translating the verbal language. Communication between mother and daughter requires understanding of the meaning and value of this Other who is simultaneously born in the same family. Relating language with the female body, the Western daughters in these American-Chinese narratives realise that the perpetuation of this line of women's identity comes from the continuation of the stories they tell, right from the legends of ancient China.

The language of these mother-daughter stories may undergo translation and transformation, such as Brave Orchid's Chinese-English, Kwan's broken English or even Chengmian dialect, but each version finds a meaning and a point of orientation in an earlier version from the mother (figures). The texts examined in the first chapter are therefore complete narratives in the sense that mothers' and daughters'

stories find themselves in connection with one another across generation, time, and land. Narratives of these Western daughters exhibit an ability to construct meaning in incorporating the old into the new.

The Hong Kong stories exhibit an altogether different kind of mother-daughter narratives because of the metamorphosis of the mother image. The mother's role to tell stories, to provide help with her experience, and to give a start to the daughter's narrative has been replaced by the peer group. In terms of the maternal support they get, Hong Kong Chinese daughters are orphans just as Hong Kong has been orphaned in its colonisation. Official stories of Hong Kong have been economic success stories just as the stories of Hong Kong women examined are stories of their own isolated generation standing alone at the present.

Having been orphaned, and having to be united to the motherland become the core of many narratives of Hong Kong in the recent decades. The imminent date of reunification created the chance and moreover the need to face Hong Kong's identity in relation to China. The absent mother, or the present but monstrous mother image, can be a direct depiction of what is going on between the Mainland Chinese mother and Hong Kong, the daughter who has been given away and who has almost lost the habit of depending on the mother.

Compared to the American-Chinese narratives, stories told by some Hong Kong women show a more complex kind of completeness. They do not possess the coherent linearity found in the narratives of the Chinese-mother-American-born-daughter, yet the ambiguous mother image reflects powerfully a cultural unconscious of the way Hong Kong's Chinese-ness interact with Mainland Chinese-ness. it is a story of isolated urbanity whose identity is rebuilt every minute because of a fragmented past which is buried in the unconscious, but not quite

disappearing.

Detachment from the mother culture, as in the case of Hong Kong, is also found in Taiwanese writing. Politically the break and link between Taiwan and her mother culture is more complicated than the British colony called Hong Kong. While official Hong Kong history is mainly colonial history, Taiwan history is more a struggle between the colonial and the indigenous, because of a stronger sense of native identity already present before colonisation. This intricately mixed history experienced by Taiwan also means more varied cultural elements in the making of the contemporary Taiwan Chinese-ness.

Modern Taiwan female narratives exhibit this hybrid identity origin in the form of a split consciousness in its relation to the Chinese motherland. The mother figure is very different from the all-embodying figure which secures a point of orientation for the daughters as is in the American-Chinese community, even when they are present at all in the Taiwan literary context. This vagueness and ambiguity in the mother image can be seen as a literary representation of the problematic relationship existing between the two Chinese communities. Compared to the depiction of the maternal bond in Hong Kong literary writing, the Taiwan case shows both more attachment yet more conflicting sentiments. This has to do with a number of cultural elements found in Taiwan Chinese-ness.

As far as language is concerned, Taiwan and the Mainland seem to share greater similarity, but the real political and geographical circumstances separating the two entities constitute both emotional and cultural conflicts with the Mainland. The emotional and cultural conflicts appear in the form of a tension, in the individual narratives, which confronts the daughters who do not know where to turn for a sense of belonging. The absence, or the dysfunctioning of the mother figure

in these individual narratives reflects a hybrid sentiment towards the motherland.

Modern and contemporary Mainland Chinese female writing shows a similar split with the ancient mother culture. Although Mainland China shares the same geographical identity as ancient China, historical and political changes in the last century have resulted in the establishment of a new political entity and a whole lot of new problems concerning identity. Chinese-ness has come to include habits and practices of life in a lot more different places, therefore diverse qualities often contradictory to one another. Writing in modern Mainland China presents a picture of split allegiance and some narratives about the painful history of the Cultural Revolution describe a huge emotional distance between individual females and their mother culture which is the cause of their suffering. Another trait in these modern narratives is an attempt to get reconnected to the mother culture despite the difficult past experience.

The impact of the Cultural Revolution cannot be ignored considering the way it has influenced generations of Chinese people in their relations to their roots. Large scale destruction creates a sense of insecurity and this can interfere with the trust and attachment they have to their culture of origin. This is an important feature to note because one of the major casualties of this national experience was mutual trust. From the sheer amount of personal narratives written of those ten years, one can see the dire need of putting the experience into words and making sense of it. Failure to do so ends in movement away from the motherland, as seen in some of the texts studied.

The PRC was established with a hope of bringing China into the new world of independence, but inevitably, the concept of a Chinese identity stretches back thousands of years. Modern Mainland literature stands at the crossroads between

an identification with tradition and a turning away to a more Westernised approach, as in the other Chinese communities we have discussed. The literature examined shows a certain degree of Westernisation in the taking of an independent stance and questioning the meaning of tradition. The link with the mother is questioned but it does not necessarily mean a total break, rather a dialogue between the new and the old.

This intercultural dialogue among various Chinese communities shows Chinese-ness to be a network of interconnected discourses. From the American-Chinese context, it is a long journey back to the mother culture to reestablish the link. In writing about Hong Kong, the quality of Chinese-ness comes in the form of a forced isolation because of an absence of the mother guardian figure for a long period of time. A distrust and even an inattention to the mother figure is found here. Taiwan literary writing shows a schizophrenic Chinese identity because there is a desire to return to the mother as well as a yearning to move away as an independent entity. Even with Mainland narratives, the idea of Chinese-ness is no longer the rigid upholding of principles and codes of behaviour. Modern Mainland Chinese-ness is critically reassessing its position with an additional Western perspective in response to its traditions.

This study demonstrates a significant understanding of national identity. With an example as rich as Chinese in terms of its length of history, as well as its diversified identities, it is important to see that national boundaries may not be the only valid frame to use when discussing literary and cultural products. Historical change and political movements create subdivisions within a culture the individual development of which may mean an overturning of the original hierarchy of main culture and minor culture. The examples of female writings in the American-

Chinese community, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland Chinese illustrate their parallel positions in relation to one another in claiming a Chinese identity.

The study is by no means exhaustive in terms of the contents of Chinese-ness. On the contrary, these four major Chinese communities studied side by side demonstrate the inexhaustibility of cultural identity, when it is put in the flow of time and space. Chinese culture is a mother culture because she engenders the growth and maturity of her daughters without completely cutting them off. The life force of Chinese culture manifests itself in her ability still to interact with her daughters in other aspects after they are married. The identity of contemporary Chinese culture is an interactive, mutual culture which is self-generative in time.

This literary journey across four Chinese communities attempts a deeper understanding of the concept of Chinese identity today. Chinese literature today is an interesting field of study because of the metamorphosis undergone in different regions of the Chinese culture. While there is still more or less a cluster of qualities such as "conservatism" and "traditions" which could be used to refer to the Chinese in a very general sense, political and cultural realities have demonstrated the inadequacies of such a general view. Modern literature of the four Chinese communities studied illustrates distinct features of these regions in relation to a shared Chinese origin. Chinese-ness is not only a living quality which develops together with the movement of time, it is also an identity capable of incorporating with external intrusions and regenerate itself anew, as seen in the literature of these younger regions.

What is achieved in this study is of course by no means the end of the inquiry about Chinese identity. On the contrary, the examples chosen, being the most well-known groups of Chinese people, serve only as a beginning to a possibly long

investigation into greater depths of this dynamic Chinese-ness. Apart from accomplishing the tasks it sets out to do, it is also the hope of this dissertation to see further inquiries into Chinese identities in other regions of the world.

**Bibliography**

A note concerning names:

There are three systems of rendering Chinese names in this dissertation. The Cantonese transliteration is kept if the text concerned is originally written in English. The Taiwanese way of spelling is kept from already translated texts, but a pinyin spelling of the author's name will be given in brackets beside. In all my own translation of the Chinese texts, the pinyin romanisation is used.

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